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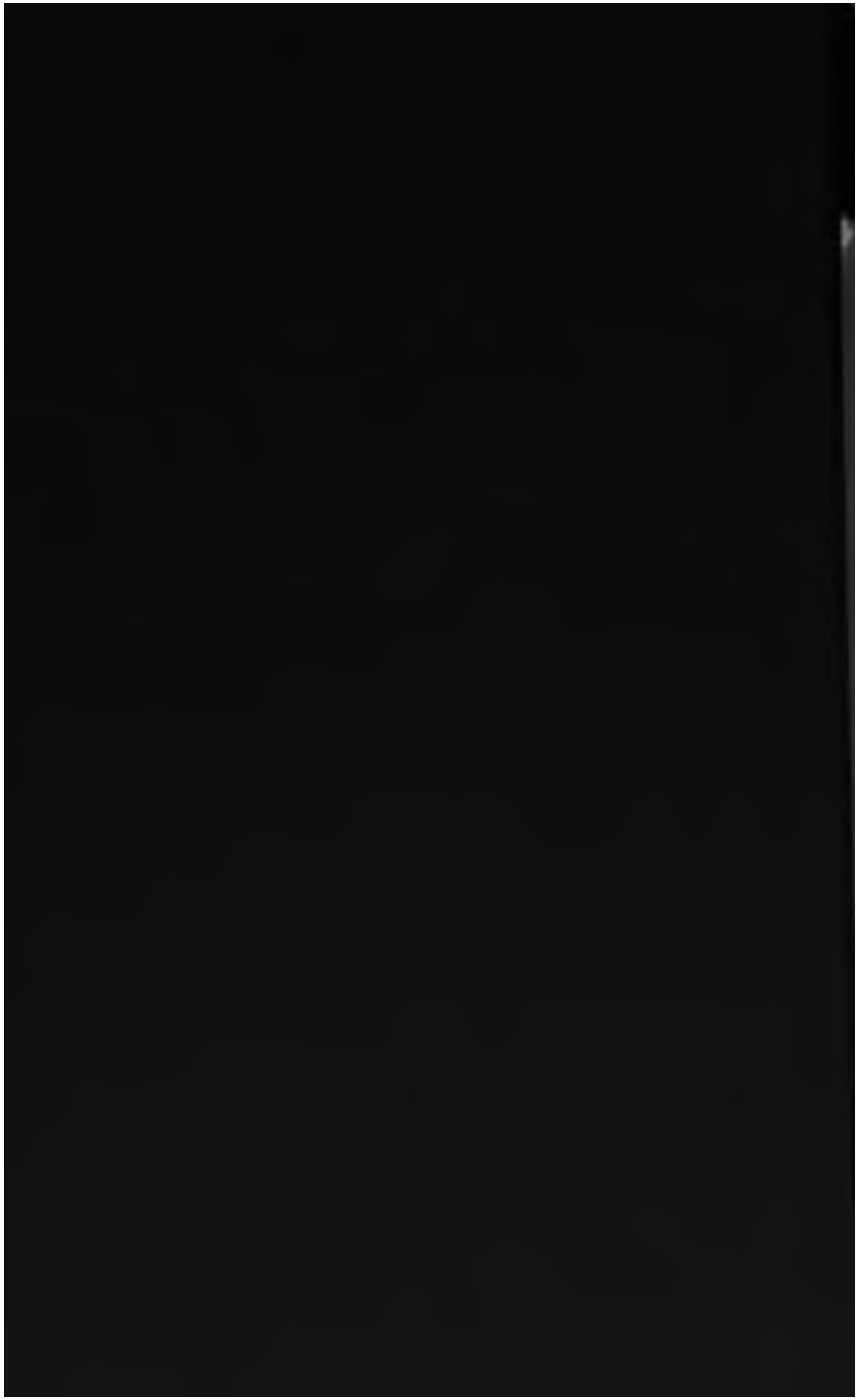

C. HADDON CHAMBERS

THE TYRANNY OF TEARS

A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS

WALTER H. BAKER & CO., BOSTON

THE TYRANNY OF TEARS

R. F. D. No. 1, Box 165
PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

THE TYRANNY OF TEARS

A COMEDY
IN FOUR ACTS

BY C. HADDON CHAMBERS

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TO

MY MOTHER

PERSONS CONCERNED

MR. PARBURY.

MR. GEORGE GUNNING.

COLONEL ARMITAGE, *Mrs. Parbury's father.*

MRS. PARBURY.

MISS HYACINTH WOODWARD.

EVANS, *Parbury's butler.*

CAROLINE, *Mrs. Parbury's maid.*

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

"The Tyranny of Tears," a comedy of the emotions, is most ingeniously constructed on the simplest lines; it is a triumph of the commonplace. Played virtually by five characters, and with but one change of scene, it has that specious appearance of ease which is due to dexterity of craftsmanship. It is refreshing, free from theatrical expedients, and save perhaps for the somewhat accelerated wooing in Act Four, knots which we are accustomed to see snipped by the scissors of an erratic fate are here gently untangled by the fingers of probability. The germ of it, a matter of fortunate selection, is a human foible so universal that if a man is not conscious of it in his own proper person, he has not failed to smile over it among his neighbors: that combination of fondness and egoism out of which tyranny is legitimately born. This is the keynote; it announces itself speedily upon the raising of the curtain, and it is never for a moment after obscured by those modern subtilties calculated to provoke discussion among the elect. The hearer equipped with ordinary experience finds himself listening to it with an acquiescent stream of running comment. He knows this alphabet. It spells familiar words, and they come frequently. Here are commonplaces which he has failed perhaps to for-

mulate; but now they flash upon the inward eye with a convincing vividness. This, he sees at once, is a picture of pink and white tyranny, the triumph of the weak. Domestic life has been caught and fixed at the culmination of a strain: one of those dramatic moments when the cord snaps because it has been for a long time fraying. One party to the contract has drawn up a code and imposed it upon his mate. The tyrant has some piquancy; she disarms suspicion because, although a despot, she is masquerading as something else. Another sort of bully we know: the buckram female, loud-voiced, militant, announcing herself, like the mosquito, by a vicious trumpeting. Invulnerability sits on her helm; her armor clanks a little while she strides. But this new tyrant wears another mien. Behold her! a soft-cheeked, gentle-handed ministrant, who would have husbands happy, provided they show the chivalrous courtesy of becoming so in woman's way. She knows the rules of the game according as her sex interprets them, and it never enters her ingenuous mind that "in marriage there are two ideals to be realized." Thus does she make her gentle progress, the victim beside her crowned with garlands, but yet a victim. She is the archdestroyer, the juggernaut in muslin.

As soon, therefore, as she is recognized, there is a great pricking-up of ears all over the house. Few are they whose withers are unwrung. Every man among them, primed with his own warfare or that of some defeated chum, settles down to the play, and wives follow suit with a guilty sense that such things are, though "not, thank heaven! under roof of mine."

A sly humor runs through the piece like a warm-colored thread, a humor always faithful to those universal traits that make us kin. It asserts itself robustly from time to

time, once, for a notable instance, in the fact that Parbury is moderately well content in his fool's paradise until Gunning appears to beckon him out of it. Heretofore he has accepted his experience like a chronic indigestion or a lameness to which he was born; but now comes another man like unto himself, and welds the data of his martyrdom into a cannonball. This man generalizes, and Parbury at once perceives that husbands are not the victims of special visitation, but of an epidemic. The thing is universal. It can be classified; it can even be attacked. He stands shoulder to shoulder with his suffering brothers, and makes his stroke for liberty.

This is everyday life and the dialogue expresses it; the lines are neither too bright nor good for any drawing-room. Here are no sky-rocketings to make the hearer gasp at the playwright's cleverness, while at the same time they accentuate the difference between his own world and the world as it glitters from the stage. It is the talk to be expected out of the mouths of admirable yet matter-of-fact persons with whom we are quite at home. This is the man you meet at any corner, who is living his life as he conceives it, and is vaguely discomfited when the pattern comes out wrong. He and his fellow puppets are related in the most intimate and delightful way to our own cousins and aunts. It is a group of sharply differentiated types: Parbury, honey-combed with something that passes for amiability; his charming ruler, worldly-wise Gunning, fitted like a glove with amiable cynicisms; the Colonel, clad in rejuvenescence like the spring; and Miss Woodward, an original piquing to the intelligence of any actress ambitious to "create a part."

"The Tyranny of Tears" was first produced at the Criterion Theatre in London, April 6, 1899, with the following

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

MR. PARBURY	MR. CHARLES WYNDHAM
MR. GEORGE GUNNING	MR. FRED KERR
COLONEL ARMITAGE	MR. ALFRED BISHOP
MRS. PARBURY	MISS MARY MOORE
MISS HYACINTH WOODWARD . .	MISS MAUDE MILLETT

The comedy made an instant and striking success, and ran to enormous business until the end of the season. It was revived on January 29, 1902, when the press, previously unstinting in its praise, greeted it with a renewed enthusiasm. The *Times* says of it, at this second hearing: "No English dramatist of our time has turned out more humorous or more human work than this delightful comedy. Every feeling in it is, as the French say, 'lived,' and every word of it tells. There is not a false note, no over-strained sentiment, no over-emphasized phrase in it from one end to the other. Wit it has in abundance, but not in superabundance — wit, that is, that obviously belongs to the speaker and does not delusively suggest the author. Truth, too, it has, but always simple, straightforward, fundamental truth, truth that comes home to men's business and bosoms, not the far-fetched truth which costs a headache to master it. . . . The *Comic Spirit*, as expounded by Mr. George Meredith, inhabits it. We laugh at its personages and forgive them with an intimate solace, for in forgiving them we laughingly forgive ourselves. . . . The whole tone of the play is quiet, it soothes, it provokes smiles, chuckles, gentle ripples of laughter. It is a rebuke, a kindly, playful rebuke to the wild and whirling zealots of theatrical violence. We are reminded of the praise which Matthew Arnold bestowed upon the style of Addison — 'perfect,' he said, 'in measure, balance and propriety.'"

Equally warm tributes to the comedy as an unusual work of dramatic art were accorded on its presentation, September 11, 1899, at the Empire Theatre, New York, with the following

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

MR. PARBURY . . . . . MR. JOHN DREW
MR. GEORGE GUNNING . . . . . MR. ARTHUR BYRON
COLONEL ARMITAGE . . . . . MR. HARRY HARWOOD
MRS. PARBURY . . . . . MISS ISABEL IRVING
MISS HYACINTH WOODWARD . . . MISS IDA CONQUEST

Of this performance Mr. J. Ranken Towse, in the New York *Evening Post*, says: "Mr. Drew played Parbury with his accustomed neatness and dexterity. . . . The play, perhaps, may not be quite highly seasoned enough with dramatic incident for the great mass of the public, but its ingenuity, its simplicity, its truthfulness and its humor will commend it strongly to connoisseurs."

It was afterwards given in the principal cities of the United States with Mr. Drew as the victimized husband, and met everywhere with the same enthusiastic favor. This year, 1902, the play was done into German by Bertha Pozson, and it has been given with extraordinary success throughout the German Empire.

Mr. Chambers's earlier work lay more in the direction of strong dramas such as "Captain Swift," "The Idler," and "John a' Dreams," but the comedy of these plays, especially the last, was of a character to foreshadow to some extent the praiseworthy achievement represented by "The Tyranny of Tears."

ALICE BROWN.

THE TYRANNY OF TEARS

ACT I

SCENE.—MR. CLEMENT PARBURY'S *study at his house in the neighbourhood of Hampstead Heath. The main entrance leading from the hall is* L. *A door,* R., *leads to the dining-room. A glass door,* R.C., *opens into a garden. The fireplace is* C. *The room is comfortably and not severely furnished. The furniture is made up of "odds and ends" selected with taste. The couch down* L. *is a deep and cosy one; the desk or writing-table about* R.C. *is a large and serviceable one. There is a smaller desk higher up, and near it on wall,* R., *a telephone apparatus. The apartment altogether represents the workshop of a literary man of careless good taste. There is a touch, too, of femininity in its decorations, and a portrait of* MRS. PARBURY *is the only picture on the walls, which otherwise are mostly hidden by bookcases.*

[*For a few moments before and when the curtain rises the noise of street singers is heard.* MISS WOODWARD *and* EVANS *are discovered.* MISS WOODWARD *is dressed with severe simplicity in a costume of dark colour,*

with linen collar and cuffs; her dark hair is drawn back from her forehead. Her costume, being well cut, does not conceal the graceful outline of her figure. She is a handsome, innocent, yet determined-looking girl of twenty. She is at the window looking out.

EVANS.

[*Raising his voice above the outside singers.*] They wouldn't listen to me, Miss Woodward! [*Suddenly the music stops. A pause.*] Ah, they've listened to Mr. Parbury! [MISS WOODWARD *goes to desk*, R., *sits.*] Mr. Parbury's a very masterful man—outside his house—isn't he, Miss? [MISS WOODWARD *favours* EVANS *with a cold stare, then resumes work at desk.*] [*Aside.*] What an iceberg that young woman is! [*Telephone bell rings.*] [*Exit* EVANS, L.

[MISS WOODWARD *goes to telephone and takes line.*

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Speaking into telephone—very sweetly.*] Yes, are you there?—yes—who are you? Speak a little louder, please. Oh!—Well? Yes—I don't know—Mr. Parbury's just coming in now—he'll speak to you—keep the line. [*She returns to the desk.*

Enter MR. PARBURY *from garden. His hair is untidy; he is flustered and cross. He is an agreeable-looking man of about forty.*

PARBURY.

Thank heaven, they're gone! This house is a mistake! With the nerve force one expends in swear-

ing at street singers one might do some good work. Make a note, please — look for house in secluded part of country. [MISS WOODWARD *makes note.*] And make a note — write *Times re* Street Music; suggest Local Option.

MISS WOODWARD.

The *Saturday Sentinel* is waiting to speak to you on the telephone.

PARBURY.

Oh, worrying about the article, I suppose. [*Goes to telephone.*] Hullo! hullo! [*Gives them a ring up.*] Are you there? [*Crossly.*] Are you there? Well? [*Pause; he listens.*] Oh, of course, still harping on my article. I suppose that's you, Jackson? Oh, well, if you'll keep this confounded telephone quiet, and send a man to clear the neighbourhood of street singers, you'll have a chance of receiving the copy in half-an-hour. What? All right, old man. Yes, yes. I'll send it by special messenger. Yes. Good-bye! [*Rings off, and hangs up tube.*] That is another mistake—that telephone.

MISS WOODWARD.

I was afraid you would find it so.

PARBURY.

You were right! You are always right! But my wife thought it would save me a lot of correspondence and a lot of going out. [*Aside, with a sigh.*] I always liked going out. [*Aloud.*] Make a note, please—get rid of the telephone. [MISS WOODWARD *makes note.*] [*Goes to top of table,* R.C.] Now we'll get on, please. I've promised the article in half-an-hour.

[*Looks at his watch.*] They go to press this afternoon.

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Sits at desk, note-book before her.*] Shall I read the last sentence?

PARBURY.

Please.

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Reading.*] "The pity of it is that Mr. Theodore Bellevue seems to enjoy a positively huge contentment of his own achievement——"

PARBURY.

[*Thinking.*] The pity of it—yes—yes, of his own achievement. Yes. [*Walks the stage.*] Achievement. [*Under his breath.*] Damn the street singers! Damn the telephone! [*Aloud.*] What is it? Oh—ah! Contentment of his own achievement—er—er— [*Dictates.*] "One gathers from the complacency of his manner—[*Pause*]—that his iconoclasm is its own reward—" Er—"What follows in the approval of the unthinking—the applause of the uncultured—" [*Pause.*] What's that?

MISS WOODWARD.

The applause of the uncultured.

PARBURY.

"Makes up—makes up—" Er— [*Pulls his hair.*] Er——

Enter MRS. PARBURY, L. *She is a pretty, fragile, little woman of about twenty-eight, and is charmingly dressed.*

MRS. PARBURY.

I'm not interrupting, am I, darling?

PARBURY.

[*Concealing his irritation.*] No, darling, but——

MRS. PARBURY.

I'll be ever so quiet. [*Comes to couch, sits* L.]

PARBURY.

Yes, I know, dear—but, I fear—I fear you'll be rather bored. I'm dictating an article that *must* be finished this afternoon——

MRS. PARBURY.

Oh, I shall like it! Go on as if I were not in the room. But oh, how tumbled your hair is. [*Rises, goes to him.*] I must put it straight. Then you'll be able to think better. There! Now I can see his clever forehead again! [*Goes to couch and sits.*]

[PARBURY *walks up* C. *and back, trying to collect his thoughts; then he looks at* MRS. PARBURY *with the wish in his face that she were not there; finally he goes over to* MISS WOODWARD *and speaks in a lowered voice.*

PARBURY.

[*At top of table,* R.] What was that last?

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Reading in a lowered voice.*] "What follows in the approval of the unthinking, the applause of the uncultured makes up."

PARBURY.

Yes, yes. Makes up! [*Fidgeting.*] Makes up— [*Vaguely.*] What does it make up? I'm damned if I know what it does make up now? I've forgotten.

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Looking up at him with discreet sympathy after a glance at* MRS. PARBURY.] Shall I go back a little?

PARBURY.

Please do. Cut the other; it doesn't make up anything.

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Reading.*] "One gathers from the complacency of his manner that his iconoclasm is its own reward."

PARBURY.

Thanks. Where's his article?

[MISS WOODWARD *rises, gives him an open magazine, and resumes her seat.*

[*After glancing at the magazine, and still in a low voice.*] "His smug self-sufficiency——" [*Pause.*]

MRS. PARBURY.

Darling! I can't hear you.

[*Pause.* PARBURY'S *and* MISS WOODWARD'S *eyes meet.*

PARBURY.

Can't you, dear? I suppose I must unconsciously have lowered my voice.

MRS. PARBURY.

I'm sure you did.

PARBURY.

I've an idea. [*Comes behind her and touches her shoulders caressingly.*] Suppose I finish the article quickly and give it to you to read before sending it away?

MRS. PARBURY.

Yes, do.

[PARBURY *looks at her, expecting her to move, but she doesn't.*

PARBURY.

Well, dear?

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Wonderingly.*] Well?

PARBURY.

You—you're not going?

MRS. PARBURY.

Going!

PARBURY.

Yes, dear. I thought——

MRS. PARBURY.

[*With great reproach, and looking as if about to cry.*] Clement! [*She rises, and with trembling hands begins to gather up her fancy work.*]

PARBURY.

[*Relenting.*] Don't go, dear, unless you wish to.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*More tremblingly and tearfully.*] I certainly don't wish to remain where I am unwelcome.

PARBURY.

[*Reproachfully.*] Mabel!

MRS. PARBURY.

I thought I had a right to be where my husband was—that the privileges of a wife were at least equal to those of a secretary.

PARBURY.

[*In a low voice.*] Hush, dear! [*Turns to* MISS WOODWARD, *who has been a secret but attentive observer of the scene.*] Miss Woodward, would you kindly run what we have done into type? We'll finish presently.

[MISS WOODWARD *rises, takes her notes, and crosses to door*, L. *At the screen she pauses a moment, shrugs her shoulders, and exits* R.I.E.

[PARBURY *passes his arm round* MRS. PARBURY.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Freeing herself.*] Oh, no; you wished me to go, and I'm going.

PARBURY.

It doesn't matter now. [*Grimly.*] The article

hasn't a million to one chance of being finished this afternoon.

MRS. PARBURY.

Why did you send Miss Woodward away?

PARBURY.

Frankly? [*Puts magazine on table*, R.

MRS. PARBURY.

Of course.

PARBURY.

Because I hate scenes before other people.

MRS. PARBURY.

Scenes! What do you mean?

PARBURY.

[C.] What! Isn't there to be a scene? How splendid!

MRS. PARBURY.

[L.C.] I don't understand the humour you are in.

PARBURY.

I'm in a capital humour, dear. You've saved me for the moment from a savage attack on the work of a man whom I respect and admire.

MRS. PARBURY.

You mean simply that I've interrupted your work. You will not have reason to complain again.

[*Is going.*

PARBURY.

Wait, dear.

MRS. PARBURY.

No, no. There are things one can't get over. Perhaps you can explain why it is that Miss Woodward's presence doesn't disturb you, while mine does?

PARBURY.

Easily. Miss Woodward is a mouse.

MRS. PARBURY.

I hate mice!

PARBURY.

I mean she is a table—a chair—a desk—a dictionary—a something useful that is always in the right place at the right moment, and yet of whose presence one is pleasantly unconscious. She is a triumph of the negative.

MRS. PARBURY.

And I? [*Her face is not turned to him.*

PARBURY.

Positive, my love—quite positive; you bristle with emotions. When you are in the room, one knows it. [MRS. PARBURY *takes out her handkerchief and begins to cry. Pause.* PARBURY, *who has gone to desk, looks round inquiringly, then comes down gently and sees what she is doing.*] [*Aside.*] Exactly!

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Wiping her eyes.*] Of course I quite understand now that you don't love me.

PARBURY.

[*Comes to her, concealing his impatience.*] But I do! I do!

MRS. PARBURY.

Oh no, you don't! When we were first married you didn't object to my being in the room when you were working.

PARBURY.

I admit I didn't *say* so then; I was younger, and had more patience and stronger nerves.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Turning to him with a gleam of anger.*] Then you admit you have always objected to my presence in your study?

PARBURY.

[*Smoothly.*] I admit I have always felt that a writing man's writing hours are sacred hours.

MRS. PARBURY.

They shouldn't be sacred from his wife.

PARBURY.

[*Gently.*] They should be sacred *to* his wife, dear. [*Slight pause.*] If you were a writing woman you would understand what I mean.

MRS. PARBURY.

I'm sure I'm very sorry I'm not a genius, but you understood that when you married me, didn't you?

PARBURY.

Yes, darling, I quite understood that! [*He appears to say this quite unconsciously.* MRS. PARBURY *turns to him deeply offended, then suddenly goes up to leave the room. He quickly meets her,* C.] [*Taking her hands.*] I only knew you were the best little woman in the world!

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Struggling to free her hands.*] Don't, please. I'm going!

PARBURY.

Where?

MRS. PARBURY.

To send Miss Woodward to you, since you prefer her society to mine.

PARBURY.

But I tell you I'm scarcely conscious of the girl's existence; anyway, it was you who brought her here. You may remember I proposed having a male secretary.

MRS. PARBURY.

Yes; to make a companion of at my expense. You were always a man's man! If I had had more experience I would have known that by the host of men friends you had when we married.

PARBURY.

[*Cheerily.*] I haven't them now, dear.

MRS. PARBURY.

You mean—that I— [*Struggling to release her hands.*] You are most brutal. Let me go!

PARBURY.

Not while you are angry, dear.

[*Gently forces her into a chair*, R.C.

[*There is another slight pause. She is certainly angry, but she doesn't attempt to leave the chair. He looks down at her, and lays a hand lightly on her hair.*

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Brushing his hand away*] Please don't do that. I am not a child! [PARBURY *takes a chair and sits next to her. Pause.*] Perhaps you will tell me why you have used your superior strength to keep me here against my will?

PARBURY.

[*Taking her hand.*] Do you know that I'm very much in love with you?

MRS. PARBURY.

You in love with me! You don't know what love is! All you feel at this moment is the sort of insolent pity the strong have for the weak.

PARBURY.

You weak, darling! Oh, come! You know better than that! You can't be unconscious of your power!

MRS. PARBURY.

I really don't understand you.

PARBURY.

I only meant to remind you that after all you do always get your own way. I'm really very glad, for I'm sure your way must always be the best way. Oh, the power and determination of this little hand! [*Holding her hand.*] Do let me, with the deepest submission, kiss "The Mailed Fist."

[*He kisses her hand.*

MRS. PARBURY.

As it pleases you to be rude to me I shall try to bear it patiently.

PARBURY.

I don't mean to be rude. It's my unfortunate way of putting things. I kissed your hand because of the real tender love my heart holds for you, and for the same reason I put back this dear, rebellious little lock of hair which has escaped from over your ear. And what a perfect ear! It's as delicate and fragile as a shell, and it's just the daintiest pink possible.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Mollified.*] I know my ears are all right, though I think you are making fun of me.

PARBURY.

I think I'm making love to you.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Suddenly taking one of his hands in hers.*] Oh, if you only loved me in the way I love you!

PARBURY.

I love you in a most excellent way.

MRS. PARBURY.

But it's different—you don't understand. I love to breathe the air you breathe, to hear your voice even when it's dictating a dry article, to listen to your footsteps, to watch the changing expressions on your face. I live by the warmth your life gives me; you don't grudge me that, do you?

PARBURY.

Why, of course not, darling!

MRS. PARBURY.

I love this room because it is yours, the surroundings are yours, the atmosphere is yours. When you are out——

PARBURY.

[*Gently patting her hand.*] Which is not often, dear.

MRS. PARBURY.

When you are out I always stay here, because here I get most of you; even the thin odour of cigarette smoke is dear to me. Smoke now.

PARBURY.

Shall I?

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Gives him a cigarette from his case on table, and lights it.*] That's delightful! [*Sniffs the smoke.*] But only because it's you! I used to detest tobacco.

PARBURY.

[*Smiling.*] You dear! [*Puts his arm around her.*

MRS. PARBURY.

You understand a little now, don't you?
[*Putting her head on his shoulder.*

PARBURY.

Perfectly!

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Rising.*] And you are not angry any more?

PARBURY.

Was I angry? [*Rises.*

MRS. PARBURY.

Horribly!

PARBURY.

I'm sorry.

MRS. PARBURY.

Not vexed about the article?

PARBURY.

Bother the article. I knew it hadn't a million to one chance!

MRS. PARBURY.

And it doesn't matter?

PARBURY.

Not in the least!

MRS. PARBURY.

Then we may have tea in here?

PARBURY.

Rather! Let's go the pace.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Goes to him, standing before him, her hands by her sides.*] Kiss me! [*He kisses her. She throws her arms round him and whispers to him. He whispers a word in reply. They both laugh slightly, and he playfully pinches her cheek.*] Brute! [*She smooths her hair and goes to door,* L.; *turns at door and blows him a kiss, to which he responds.*]

[*Exit* MRS. PARBURY, L.

PARBURY.

[*Standing for moment,* C., *a whimsical look on his face.*] Dear little woman! What a pity she cries so much! [*Puts chair up,* R.; *goes to desk and turns over pages of magazine, still continuing his thought.*] What a pity! What a pity!

Enter MISS WOODWARD *carrying loose type-written MS.* PARBURY *glances up from his magazine as she places the leaves on the desk.*

Oh, thanks!

MISS WOODWARD.

Do you wish to finish the article now?

PARBURY.

Impossible! Tea will be taken here in a few minutes.

MISS WOODWARD.

[*With a touch of indignant surprise.*] Here? . . . Oh, I beg your pardon!

PARBURY.

Not at all! I said here! [*Throws down magazine, goes up to fireplace, C.* MISS WOODWARD *permits a slight groan to escape her.*] Eh?

MISS WOODWARD.

Nothing, I didn't speak!

[*Sits and bends over desk.*

[PARBURY *looks at her suddenly and keenly as though he had never noticed her before. Slight pause. She arranges papers at desk. He is leaning against the mantelpiece.*

PARBURY.

Do you know, Miss Woodward, I believe you are more disappointed about that article than I am.

MISS WOODWARD.

I was certainly very interested.

PARBURY.

Why?

MISS WOODWARD.

It was so strong! I admire strength.

PARBURY.

[*Smiling.*] You are not then quite the machine

one gets into the habit of imagining one's secretary to be?

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Meeting his eye calmly and fearlessly for a moment.*] I should like to be what you wish me to be.

PARBURY.

[*A little disconcerted.*] Humph! [*Stands with his hands in his pockets looking at her, while she is busy at the desk.*]

[*The door*, L., *suddenly opens.* PARBURY *starts almost violently.* MRS. PARBURY *puts her head into the room.*

MRS. PARBURY.

Darling, I've got rid of a would-be intruder for you. I thought you'd like to know.

PARBURY.

Thank you, dear; who was it?

MRS. PARBURY.

A horrid person named Gunning. There's the creature's card. [*Throws card into room on to chair by door* L.] I knew you'd be pleased, darling! Tea in five minutes.

[*Exit* MRS. PARBURY, *closing door.*

PARBURY.

Gunning! Not George surely? [*Quickly gets the card.*] It is! My dear old friend; I wouldn't miss seeing him for worlds! [*Rushes to window, opens it, and bends out.*] Why, there he is, going across the

GUNNING.

Oh, I'd have written to you, but what was the good of it? I'm not literary, and I'm not married.

PARBURY.

And so you've kept away for five years.

GUNNING.

About that. [*Sits on arm of sofa*, L.C.

PARBURY.

Five years and three months—for I've been married all that time, and you neither came to the wedding nor called on me afterwards.

GUNNING.

I was discreet.

PARBURY.

Discreet! Damned unfriendly, I call it, considering the years we had been pals.

GUNNING.

Well, the rest of our old set stuck to you, anyway. What has become of them? Take Wybrow, for instance—an awful good chap!

PARBURY.

Wybrow, Wybrow—what *has* become of Wybrow?

GUNNING.

Never comes here, eh?

PARBURY.

Well, he did a few times some years ago, but——

GUNNING.

I understand—a little too Bohemian.

PARBURY.

[*Quickly.*] Not for me, George, I assure you.

GUNNING.

No, no, of course not, my dear chap. Exit Bohemian Wybrow. Then there was Carson—one of the best?

PARBURY.

[*Warmly.*] Wasn't he a good fellow?

GUNNING.

Capital! Where is he?

PARBURY.

Married, you know.

GUNNING.

So I heard. You meet constantly, of course?

PARBURY.

No, we met them at Brighton one winter some years ago, but I don't think our wives quite—you understand, don't you?

GUNNING.

Yes, yes, I understand. You dropped the Carsons. But Burleigh——

PARBURY.

Burleigh—ah! [*Laughs.*

GUNNING.

There was a great spirit if you like; he was your best man.

PARBURY.

Yes; he gave me this watch.

GUNNING.

Which you still wear. Touching constancy! When did you see him last?

PARBURY.

Wait a moment. What is all this interrogation for?

GUNNING.

Idle curiosity if you like—study of life if you like. Come, out with it, when did you last have dear old Tom Burleigh to dinner?

PARBURY.

[*Almost defiantly.*] The day we returned from our honeymoon. [*Slightly awkward pause.*

GUNNING.

[*Musingly.*] About five years and six weeks ago.

PARBURY.

Of course, I see a lot of him at the Clubs. That is to say, I used to when I was still a Club man.

GUNNING.

Which now you are not?

PARBURY.

Which now I am not! What does a man want with a Club when he has a home of his own?

GUNNING.

Excellent sentiment; but neither the sentiment nor the words are your own, Clement. [*Their eyes meet and they burst into laughter.*] I know, I know; "and what does a man want with men friends when he has a wife of his own," and "the husband's old friends are the wife's worst enemies," and "what I say about Clubs is, down with them!"

[*Laughs, sits on sofa,* L.C.

PARBURY.

[*Suddenly serious.*] What the devil are you laughing at, George? You don't presume——

GUNNING.

I—why, of course not, my dear chap. Only now you see how wise I was not to intrude after your marriage, not to wait for my congé as the other poor boys did! I knew something.

PARBURY.

You always did, you brute! I believe you were born knowing something. [*Leans on back of sofa.* But seriously [*lowers his voice*], George, I assure you she's the best little woman in the world!

GUNNING.

Why, of course; it would be impious to suggest otherwise.

[*Exit* MISS WOODWARD.

PARBURY.

Burleigh—ah! [*Laughs.*

GUNNING.

There was a great spirit if you like; he was your best man.

PARBURY.

Yes; he gave me this watch.

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[*Laughs, sits on sofa,* L.C.

PARBURY.

[*Suddenly serious.*] What the devil are you laughing at, George? You don't presume——

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GUNNING.

Why, of course; it would be impious to suggest otherwise.

[*Exit* MISS WOODWARD.

[*His eyes follow her off.*] A perfect wife, and a charming secretary! You're a lucky fellow, Clement!

PARBURY.

Is Miss Woodward charming? On my word, I hadn't noticed it, but I'm in love with my wife, you see.

GUNNING.

Of course you would be the last to discover that your secretary was personally pleasing.

PARBURY.

You're a sinister scoundrel, George, and coarse to a fault. Now, tell me what you've been doing all these years—shedding your illusions apparently.

GUNNING.

I've had none to lose since I grew up. I got rid of mine about the time of measles and whooping-cough.

PARBURY.

It's a pity.

GUNNING.

Not at all. One can't attain the proper philosophical attitude towards life while one nourishes illusions; one can never gain perspective.

PARBURY.

Great man! How beautifully you talk! I suppose you have quite a nice thing in perspectives about with you now.

GUNNING.

Pretty well.

PARBURY.

So much for the journey of the soul. What of the body? Where have you been?

GUNNING.

Round the world twice since I saw you.

PARBURY.

What did you see on the other side?

GUNNING.

Just what one sees on this side; there is always a man—and a woman.

PARBURY.

I know you were adventuring in Upper India last year, for the papers were full of a rather fine thing you did—saved a lot of miserable lives—an ordinary, manly, commonplace, heroic, English sort of thing.

GUNNING.

Oh, don't mention that; one was carried away by impulse.

PARBURY.

And so we keep our impulses even when we lose our illusions; I'm glad of that anyway. [*Then he comes behind* GUNNING'S *chair, takes him by the shoulder, and shakes him.*] Old fool! I can't help liking you as much as ever!

GUNNING.

[*Looking up with genuine pleasure.*] Really?

PARBURY.

Honestly!

GUNNING.

[*Rises, puts his hands on* PARBURY'S *shoulders.*] Well, I'm glad, because I've often been weak enough to regret not seeing you. As for your literary successes, I suppose I ought to congratulate you; but I always knew you'd be a great man, because you never bored me.

PARBURY.

[*Drily.*] Thanks so much. Now tell me how you found me.

GUNNING.

By means of the illustrated press—interview with Mr. Clement Parbury—copyright. The author of the "Overthrow of Harvey something" at his pretty retreat at Hampstead—copyright. Snapshot of Mr. Parbury at work—copyright. View of the study from the garden—view of the garden from the study—copyright.

PARBURY.

Shut up! You make me blush.

GUNNING.

Forgive me—it's only envy. It's the envious people who call this a vulgar age, I suppose.

Enter SERVANT, L., *places occasional table for tea in front of sofa,* L.C., *and exits* L.

PARBURY.

Now you are to see my wife. How do you imagine her? Large, I suppose, with huge hands and feet and a beetling brow?

GUNNING.

I'm content to wait.

Re-enter SERVANT, L., *with tea service.*

PARBURY.

When you have had tea, you will go away to dress. You will return here to dinner at eight.

GUNNING.

I think not.

PARBURY.

One moment. You will probably meet only my wife's father, Colonel Armitage, and your dinner will be a fairly plain one, but I promise that your palate will not be outraged.

GUNNING.

I really think not, old man. I remember the fate of old Burleigh. And I never even gave you a watch.

PARBURY.

George, you hurt me. [*Slight pause.*] Then you refuse?

GUNNING.

I make conditions.

PARBURY.

What are they?

GUNNING.

That you come yachting with me from to-morrow till the end of the week. I've hired a charming little twenty-tonner, one after your own heart—that is, if your heart or my memory hasn't entirely changed.

PARBURY.

[*Enthusiastic.*] Splendid! There's nothing I should like so much; and I've no special work on hand just now.

GUNNING.

Then it's agreed!

PARBURY.

Certainly!

GUNNING.

Good; we'll drink of the Cuvée 36, brush up our swearing vocabulary, and I'll teach you to gain perspective!

PARBURY.

[*His face suddenly falling.*] Oh, the deuce!

GUNNING.

What's the matter? What are you afraid of?

PARBURY.

Of nothing in the world!

GUNNING.

[*Slapping him on the back.*] Hero!

Enter MRS. PARBURY, L., *wearing a bright smile, which fades when she sees* GUNNING.

PARBURY.

Mabel, I want to present you to my dear old friend, George Gunning. My wife, George.

[GUNNING *crosses to* MRS. PARBURY. *Shakes hands.*

MRS. PARBURY.

How do you do? I'm very pleased.

[*She gives him simultaneously a cold smile and a stiff handshake.*

GUNNING.

I'm very delighted to meet Clement's wife.

MRS. PARBURY.

You'll let me give you some tea?

[*Goes to tea-table; sits on sofa.*

GUNNING.

Thank you. [*Aside to* PARBURY.] She's charming!

[PARBURY *digs him in the ribs.* GUNNING *goes to tea-table.* PARBURY *sits at desk.*

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Handing* GUNNING *tea-cup.*] I've given you no sugar.

GUNNING.

I'll take one piece. [*Does so.*

Enter MISS WOODWARD, R.I.E., *with MS., which she hands to* PARBURY.

PARBURY.

Thank you. [*He reads and signs letters.*

MRS. PARBURY.

Clement, come for your tea.

PARBURY.

In one moment, dear.

MRS. PARBURY.

Miss Woodward, you will take tea?

MISS WOODWARD.

Thank you, yes.

GUNNING.

[*To* MRS. PARBURY.] Allow me.

[*Takes* MISS WOODWARD'S *cup to her, and offers her bread and butter, &c.*

MISS WOODWARD.

Thank you.

PARBURY.

You've often heard me speak of Gunning, Mabel; we were at Cambridge together.

MRS. PARBURY.

Oh yes, I remember! [*To* GUNNING.] You were very great friends?

GUNNING.

Inseparables!

PARBURY.

I should say so!

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Uneasily.*] Indeed!

PARBURY.

[*Comes over and takes his tea.*] You see, Gunning had been my fag at Harrow, and my ill-treatment of

him inspired a dog-like devotion. [*To* MISS WOODWARD.] Let me take your cup. [*Adds in a lower voice.*] I've an idea!

[MISS WOODWARD *goes to desk;* PARBURY *follows her to desk.*]

GUNNING.

Let me. [*Assists* MRS. PARBURY *with the tea service.*

PARBURY.

[*To* MISS WOODWARD *in a low voice.*] I think I can finish the article in three sentences. Take your notes into the other room; I'll join you in a moment.

[MISS WOODWARD *gathers her notes and exits* R.]

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Pouring out a fresh cup of tea for* GUNNING.] But of course it's not in the nature of things that college friendships, however strong, can last always. Time estranges, doesn't it, Mr. Gunning, and fate drives people into different—well, different ways of life, doesn't it? Some men marry soon. Are you married, Mr. Gunning?

GUNNING.

Alas, no, Mrs. Parbury!

PARBURY.

He has too much respect for your sex, dear. Forgive me for three minutes. [*Exit* PARBURY, R.

MRS. PARBURY.

Not married? Well, I should have thought——

GUNNING.

That I'm old enough to know better. I admit it.

[*Sits* R.C.

MRS. PARBURY.

Well, I was going to say that in marriage a man changes so much. He becomes more—more——

GUNNING.

[*Gently.*] Respectable?

MRS. PARBURY.

Well, I wasn't going to say quite that; though, as you suggest it, no doubt it is true. I was going to say more responsible. He enters into a broader, a fuller life; he gains in nobility, don't you think?

GUNNING.

[*Amused.*] Oh, no doubt. Clement has improved enormously!

MRS. PARBURY.

I'm so glad you recognise that. You may smoke, Mr. Gunning, if you care to.

GUNNING.

Thank you. I'll steal one of Clement's cigarettes if I may? [*Takes cigarette from box on desk.*

MRS. PARBURY.

Of course Clement was always good and strong and clever. It only wanted marriage to—to——

GUNNING.

To perfect him?

MRS. PARBURY.

Well, I was going to say to complete him; but it comes to the same thing, doesn't it?

GUNNING.

Quite, quite!

MRS. PARBURY.

I found my happiness when I married Clement.

GUNNING.

You had been looking for it?

MRS. PARBURY.

Of course; isn't that every woman's duty?

GUNNING.

Yes, yes; and every man's?

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Less confidently.*] Well, yes, I should think so.

GUNNING.

And one's happiness once found is worth fighting for?

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Firmly.*] Worth fighting very hard for!

GUNNING.

[*Drily.*] Of course. [*Aside.*] Poor Burleigh! [*Lights cigarette.*

MRS. PARBURY.

You, I suppose, have never met a woman who could make you happy?

GUNNING.

I have never met a woman whom I was sure of being able to make happy.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Slightly embarrassed.*] Oh!

GUNNING.

And, anyway, the state of marriage has always appeared to me to be a state of warfare.

MRS. PARBURY.

Mr. Gunning, you little know——

GUNNING.

I admit the case of you and Clement to be an exceptional one. I'm talking of ordinary cases—the average marriage; there you will find, according to my observation, an endless war—a war of self-interests, a war of opposing emotions, a war of irreconcilable nervous organisations——

MRS. PARBURY.

Oh, Mr. Gunning!

GUNNING.

Viewed from the hill-tops rather a pitiful sort of war, in which can be won neither the full joys of love nor the complete glories of battle.

MRS. PARBURY.

Oh, Mr. Gunning!

GUNNING.

I remain single, Mrs. Parbury, quite without happiness—except in the reflection that I am neither an oppressor exercising a daily tyranny, nor a slave rightly struggling to be free.

MRS. PARBURY.

Of course I don't in the least agree with you. [*The telephone bell rings.*] [*Rising.*] There's some one

on the telephone—forgive me. [*Goes to telephone box and puts the communicator to her ear.*] Are you there? —yes—who are you?—the article—yes—no, you can't have it to-day—no, it hasn't a million to one chance of being finished. [*To* GUNNING, *with a smile.*] That's Clement's slang, not mine. [*Again into telephone.*] What?

Enter PARBURY *and* MISS WOODWARD, R.

I say it hasn't a million to one chance of being finished.

PARBURY.

What? Who is it?

MRS. PARBURY.

It's the *Saturday Sentinel.*

PARBURY.

But, my dear, the article is finished. [*Rushes to telephone.*] [MISS WOODWARD *and* GUNNING *are laughing secretly.* MRS. PARBURY *stands* C., *rather confused*]. [*At telephone.*] Hullo! Hullo! Are you there? [*Rings violently.*] Hullo—oh! is that you, Jackson? . . . what's the matter? [*Rather a long pause. He smiles while listening.*] No, no, not at all, my dear chap. What was said was, 'It's a million to one you'll have the copy in half-an-hour'—eh?—yes, those were the very words . . . no, quite a mistake, you don't listen properly. A messenger has just gone off in a cab with it. What? Yes. [*Laughs.*] All right! Good-bye!

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Seeing* MISS WOODWARD *laughing.*] I really don't know what there is to laugh at, Miss Woodward.

MISS WOODWARD.

I was only smiling at the messenger in the cab.
[*Folds MS. and puts it in envelope.*

PARBURY.

Yes, send some one at once, please, Miss Woodward.
[*Exit* MISS WOODWARD, R.V.E.

MRS. PARBURY.

It wasn't my fault, dear. You know you did use those words.

PARBURY.

My fault entirely. [*Aside to* GUNNING.] Have you told her?

GUNNING.

What?

PARBURY.

About the yachting?

GUNNING.

Why, of course not. That's your affair, my dear fellow.

PARBURY.

[*His hand on* GUNNING'S *shoulder.*] Mabel, dear, we're going yachting for a few days. I think I want a little change.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Coming towards them, brightly.*] Oh, what a good idea! When do we go? [PARBURY *and* GUNNING *look at each other.*] Are you coming, Mr. Gunning?

[PARBURY *presses* GUNNING *forward.* GUNNING *looks round at* PARBURY *reproachfully.* PARBURY *goes up stage.*

GUNNING.

[*Embarrassed.*] Well, it's my yacht, Mrs. Parbury, but she's very small—only a little tub of a thing; and— [*Looks at his watch.*] By Jove! I'll never be able to dress and get back for dinner if I don't hurry. [*Gets his hat and gloves*, L. *Goes up quickly.*] I need only say *au revoir;* don't trouble, Clement, I'll find my way out—*au revoir!* [*Exit* GUNNING, L.

[MRS. PARBURY, *who is puzzled, sits on sofa.*

PARBURY.

[*Calling after* GUNNING.] Dinner at eight, remember.

GUNNING.

[*Outside.*] All right!

PARBURY.

[*Shuts the door.*] Capital fellow, George Gunning! [*Comes to back of sofa.*

MRS. PARBURY.

What does he mean by a little tub of a thing? Surely we're not——

PARBURY.

No, dear, certainly not. You're quite right. I wouldn't think of letting you run any risks.

MRS. PARBURY.

Then we're not going?

PARBURY.

No, dear; that is to say, Gunning and I are going.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Rising, aghast.*] Without me?

PARBURY.

Only for a few days, of course. [*Laughing feebly.*

MRS. PARBURY.

You are not serious?

PARBURY.

Quite! [*His laugh becomes feebler.*

MRS. PARBURY.

But—but you never go away without me!

PARBURY.

I haven't hitherto, but——

MRS. PARBURY.

Well? [*Appears about to cry.*

PARBURY.

I've been working very hard, you know, lately. I feel I want a change.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Tearfully.*] It doesn't occur to you that I might want a change.

PARBURY.

Well, have one, dear. Aunt Martha would be delighted to have you at Oaklands.

MRS. PARBURY.

I don't want to go to Aunt Martha. How would you like to go to Aunt Martha?

PARBURY.

[*Suppressing a groan.*] What is it you *do* want?

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Quickly.*] You! I want to be with you! It's very simple—it's not asking very much. If you don't like my being with you, why did you marry me? [*Taking out her handkerchief.*

PARBURY.

Now, dear, please don't cry! [*Aside.*] If she does, I'm done for! [*Aloud.*] It's only common sense that you can't go knocking about with a couple of men in a tub of a boat.

MRS. PARBURY.

Of course I quite know now that you don't love me. [*Bursts into tears. Sits on sofa.*

PARBURY.

[*With real irritation.*] Oh, damn it! [*Goes up, but turns quickly and comes down to her.*] 'Pon my soul, you make me almost hate——

MRS. PARBURY.

Of course you hate me. Your old friend has done that for me. You are breaking my heart!

PARBURY.

[*Who has recovered control of his temper and resumed his natural bantering tone.*] Not at all, dear. [*Sits at his desk and affects to be busy.*] I was only going to say that I hated—now, what the deuce was it I hated?—oh, I know—to see a woman cry. I do think a woman is wise who does her crying in private,

and yet—I wonder—they know best—millions to one they know best. I must write something about it.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Rises, goes to top of table,* R. *She is wiping her eyes, her back to him.*] Of course, you're going all the same?

PARBURY.

[*Affecting great pre-occupation.*] Going? Going where?

MRS. PARBURY.

With Mr. Gunning.

[*Pause. She continues to cry gently.*

PARBURY.

Gunning — Gunning! — who's Gunning? Oh — George—yachting, you mean! Not I! I'm staying here.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Comes towards him gladly, her arms extended.*] Clement!

PARBURY.

Eh? Oh, forgive me for a few minutes. [*Writes.*

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Reproachfully.*] I was only going to kiss you.

PARBURY.

[*Writing.*] All right, dear—presently—presently, there's a dear girl! [MRS. PARBURY *has a slow silent exit, looking back at him.*] [*He doesn't look up, but goes on writing. When the door closes, he puts down his pen.*] Oh, the tyranny of it! The tyranny of it!

[*Slow Curtain.*

END OF ACT I.

ACT II

SCENE.—*The same as Act I. Evening after dinner the same day. The room is lighted with lamps, but as it is a still warm evening, the curtains are not drawn over the glass door which leads into the garden and is open.*

[*Enter* EVANS, L. *He places cigars and cigarettes on occasional table, and lights a small spirit cigar-lamp.* [*Exit.*] *Voices of ladies and a ripple of laughter heard from the drawing-room, and for a moment the sound made by fingers running lightly and irresponsibly over the keys of the piano. Enter* COLONEL ARMITAGE, *followed by* GUNNING *and* PARBURY. ARMITAGE *goes to mantelpiece.* GUNNING *selects the easiest chair in the room.* PARBURY *goes to occasional table.* ARMITAGE *is a well-preserved man of sixty-five, very carefully dressed—something of an elderly dandy.*

PARBURY.

Cigarette or cigar, George?

GUNNING.

Thanks, I have a cigarette.

[*Takes one from his case and lights it.*

PARBURY.

Colonel?

PARBURY.

Nothing in the world. Why?

GUNNING.

Oh, it doesn't matter. But I think the change will do you good. [*Slight pause.*] By the way, would to-morrow afternoon suit you for a start?

PARBURY.

[*Standing with his back to the fireplace, looking up at the ceiling.*] I'm not going, old man.

GUNNING.

[*Indifferently.*] Oh!

Re-enter EVANS, R., *from garden, and exit* L.
Silence till he has gone.

PARBURY.

Well, you don't seem surprised.

GUNNING.

[*Effecting a yawn.*] I never permit myself to be surprised.

PARBURY.

Or disappointed.

GUNNING.

Oh yes, I own I'm disappointed. I looked for a good time for a few days. You were the only one of the old lot available, and you were the best of them. I can't bear the new lot. They wear strange colours, drop their "g's," and get on one's nerves.

PARBURY.

I'm really sorry, George.

GUNNING.

Don't bother. One simply goes alone. [*Discreetly.*] The calls of business are often irresistible.

PARBURY.

Don't rot. You know what the situation is.

GUNNING.

Mine is one of those poor intelligences that never know without information.

PARBURY.

I'll supply it. [*Sits on arm of chair*, R.C.

GUNNING.

Don't, if it matters.

PARBURY.

I will, though it does matter. [*Grimly.*] My wife wept.

GUNNING.

Unanswerable argument.

PARBURY.

Quite. George, what the devil is a man to do?

GUNNING.

I knew a man who once interfered between a husband and wife who were disagreeing. The husband and wife each got a black eye. The man got two.

PARBURY.

You might at least talk.

GUNNING.

Oh, certainly.

PARBURY.

You know the situation.

GUNNING.

Well, if one dare say so, I fancy you are suffering from the tyranny of a fascinating egoism.

PARBURY.

I'm suffering from the tyranny of tears.

GUNNING.

What I can't understand is how a man of your strong nature arrived where you are.

PARBURY.

I'll make an effort to tell you. To begin with, I suppose I'm fairly good-natured.

GUNNING.

Oh yes!

PARBURY.

Or say, if you like, of indolent habit, which after all often passes for the same thing. Then of course I was in love—I am still. One drifted. It's so easy to give way in little things—really not unpleasant when you're in love. And then there's one's work, which fills the mind and makes the little things appear smaller than they are. I say one drifted.

GUNNING.

Sometimes, if I know you, you rebelled. What then?

PARBURY.

[*Promptly.*] Tears! And over such absurdly paltry things! Oh, the farcical tragedy of it all! I wished to go shooting for a few days. Tears! I fancied dining and spending the evening with an old chum. Tears! I would go on a walking tour for a week. Tears! Some one would ask me for three days' hunting. Tears! Tears, you understand, always on hand. Tears—tears—tears *ad*—— [*Pulling himself up.*] No.

GUNNING.

[*Quietly.*] No—not *ad nauseam.*

PARBURY.

No, that would be too low a thing to say.

[*Goes up* R.C. *Takes stopper out of the decanter.*

GUNNING.

Do you know, Clement, I really like you tremendously.

PARBURY.

Thanks, old man. Have some more brandy?

GUNNING.

No thanks. [*Pause.*] Don't stop. I'm interested.

PARBURY.

That's all. I drifted, almost unconsciously, right up to to-day, for all the world like the man in the

moral story-book one read as a child on Sundays, who drifted in his boat on the Erie River towards Niagara. To-night I'm conscious—I'm awake—I can feel the water gliding along the boat's keel. I can see Niagara. I don't like it. What the devil's one to do?

GUNNING.

Get out and walk. [*Pause. They smoke.*

PARBURY.

Of course, I shall change it all. I must, but it will be beastly work.

GUNNING.

Beastly. When do you begin?

PARBURY.

When occasion serves. I can't go back over this yachting business. I've said I'm not going.

GUNNING.

Quite right. [*Slight pause.*

PARBURY.

Oh, if the *exigeant* women only knew—if they only knew!

Enter COLONEL ARMITAGE, R.

Talking of brandies, this is Hennessy '63. Have some, Colonel?

COLONEL.

Perhaps half a glass. [*Takes brandy and sits.*

Enter MRS. PARBURY, L., *from drawing-room.*

MRS. PARBURY.

Miss Woodward and I are boring each other. Shall we come to you, or will you come to us? [GUNNING *and* ARMITAGE *rise.*] There, the question's answered. [*Sits on sofa,* L.

Enter MISS WOODWARD, L. *She goes to the desk.*

GUNNING.

[*To* MRS. PARBURY.] You were playing the piano just now?

MRS. PARBURY.

Yes, but I play wretchedly nowadays. I gave up practising when we married.

GUNNING.

One should never give up an accomplishment.

COLONEL.

You used to play charmingly, Mabel.

MRS. PARBURY.

You thought so, dear, and that was enough for me. [*She rises and crosses to* C.] Why don't we sit in the garden? It's a perfect night. [COLONEL *strolls off to garden.*] [MRS. PARBURY *goes to* PARBURY, *who is standing by fireplace, and takes his arm. In a low voice.*] Are you still angry?

PARBURY.

[*As they go out to the garden.*] I angry with you!

Nonsense. [*He pats her hand.*] Poor little woman! Poor little woman! [*Exit* MR. *and* MRS. PARBURY.

GUNNING.

[*Crossing to* R.C. *top of the table.*] Are you not coming, Miss Woodward?

MISS WOODWARD.

No, thank you. I have some work to do.

GUNNING.

But you seem to me to be always working.

MISS WOODWARD.

I needn't, you know. I do it because I like it.

GUNNING.

What are you doing now?

MISS WOODWARD.

Correcting proof sheets of a new novel. It will save Mr. Parbury the trouble of doing it to-morrow.

GUNNING.

I wanted you to talk to me.

MISS WOODWARD.

What about?

GUNNING.

Yourself.

MISS WOODWARD.

I'm not interesting.

GUNNING.

On the contrary.

MISS WOODWARD.

What do you wish to know?

GUNNING.

All about you. May I?

MISS WOODWARD.

Will you go away and leave me to work if I tell you?

GUNNING.

Yes. [*Comes down by chair* R.C.

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Putting down her pen, and resting her cheek on her hand.*] I'm the thirteenth daughter of a parson. Why my parents had thirteen daughters, I don't know; but I suppose it was because they are very poor. We were all given the names of flowers—Rose, Lily, Tulip, Mignonette—I can't remember them all—but Hyacinth fell to my lot. Why we were called after flowers, I don't know; but I suppose it was because we are none of us the least like flowers. My eldest sister married my father's curate. I don't know why, but I suppose it was because she came first and is the plainest in the family.

GUNNING.

[*Laughing.*] Yes, well?

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Speaking in an even, emotionless way.*] Two other of my sisters run a Kindergarten, and one other is a governess. Personally I would rather be a domestic

servant. The others remain at home, help in the house, and await husbands. I fear they will wait in vain, because there are so many women in our part of the country and so few men. For my part I seized an early opportunity of learning shorthand and typewriting—and—well, here I am. Now you know the story of my life. [*She returns to her work.*

GUNNING.

I'm afraid it was deuced impertinent of me to ask.

MISS WOODWARD.

Not at all—only eminently man-like.
[*Pause. She works, he smokes.*

GUNNING.

And so you have found your happiness.

MISS WOODWARD.

Oh no. I've only just started to look for it.

GUNNING.

Oh ho! Ambitious!

MISS WOODWARD.

Very. Have you ever been poor?

GUNNING.

Yes, at one time—had to pawn things.

MISS WOODWARD.

I mean being one of fifteen in family—large inferior joints to last for days—hot, cold, hashed, minced, shepherd's pie—[GUNNING *shudders at this*]—

too much potatoes—too much boiled rice—too much bread and dripping—too much weak tea—too much polishing up of things not worth polishing up—too much darning on too little material—and for ever giving thanks out of all proportion to the benefits received. I wish some one would write the history of a hat or a frock—I mean a hat or a frock that has marched steadily and sullenly under various guises through an entire family such as ours, from the mother down to the youngest girl. What might be written of the thoughts that had been thought under such a hat, or of the hearts that had felt under such a frock!

GUNNING.

Why don't you write the story?

MISS WOODWARD.

Perhaps some day I shall try. [*Returns to her work.*] In the meantime you ought to go. You promised, you know. You have nothing more to learn. I don't think in all my life I've talked so much about myself as I have to you, a stranger.

[*She keeps her eyes on her work.*

GUNNING.

You have been engagingly frank. I do hope I shall have another opportunity——

MISS WOODWARD.

Not at all likely, Mr. Gunning. [*Pause.*] Good-night. [*Still without looking up.*]

[GUNNING *looks at her, goes up to the window, turns, looks at her again.*

GUNNING.

[*At window.*] Good-night, Miss Woodward.

[*Exit to garden*, R.

[MISS WOODWARD *goes on with her work for a few moments, then drops her face on her hand in her favourite attitude.*

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Soliloquising.*] Rather than go back, I—well, I know I'd rather die. [*She looks over the pages for a moment or two, then yawns slightly; she gathers her pages together and places a paperweight over them.*] That will have to do. [*She rises, looks off* R.] There was actually a man ready to take a sort of languid interest in me. Quite a new experience. [*She takes up* PARBURY'S *photograph and speaks to it.*] You don't take an interest in me of any kind, do you? [*To the photograph.*] You never will, and I don't think I want you to. But I do want to stay near you, because you are so strong—

Enter MRS. PARBURY *from garden carrying the* COLONEL'S *coffee cup and saucer.*

—and so weak, and so kind, and so foolish.

[MRS. PARBURY *has come down and is watching her unobserved.* MISS WOODWARD *slowly raises the photograph to her lips. The cup and saucer drop from* MRS. PARBURY'S *hand to the floor and are broken.* MISS WOODWARD, *much startled, slowly turns towards* MRS. PARBURY, *and their eyes meet. There is a pause. Suddenly, with a quick movement,* MRS. PARBURY *snatches the photograph from* MISS WOODWARD.

MRS. PARBURY.

How dare you! How dare you! [*Long pause. She is almost breathless. Then she partly regains self-control.*] What train do you intend taking?

MISS WOODWARD.

[R.C.] I don't understand you.

MRS. PARBURY.

I mean for your home, of course.

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Moves as if she had received a blow, and clasps her hands together.*] I am not going home.

MRS. PARBURY.

Oh, indeed you are. You don't suppose you can stay here, do you?

MISS WOODWARD.

Why shouldn't I?

MRS. PARBURY.

How dare you ask that when I have just caught you in the act of kissing my husband's photograph?

MISS WOODWARD.

That was in a moment of abstraction. I wasn't even thinking of Mr. Parbury.

MRS. PARBURY.

Oh! And you are the daughter of a clergyman! [*She goes up and fetches the A.B.C. from bookcase, and offers it to* MISS WOODWARD.] Here is the A.B.C.

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Turning away.*] I have no use for it just now, thank you.

MRS. PARBURY.

Then I'll look you out an early morning train myself. [*Sits* L.] Let me see—[*turning over leaves*] —Carfields, Worcestershire, isn't it? Here it is. 7.20. I suppose that's too early. 9.35; that will do. Please understand you are to take the 9.35 from Paddington in the morning.

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Firmly.*] I shall do nothing of the kind.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Ignoring the remark.*] In the meanwhile there is no necessity that my husband should know the reason of your going. You can make some excuse. I wouldn't have him know for worlds.

MISS WOODWARD.

Of course he shall never know from me—but I want you to quite understand, Mrs. Parbury, that I am *not* going to Carfields to-morrow. Rather than go home under the circumstances I would starve in the gutter.

MRS. PARBURY.

Well, you must find a lodging till you get other employment. You will have a month's salary, of course. Anyway, I'm determined you leave this house in the morning.

[*Goes up* C. *Puts A.B.C. on chair up* L.C.

MISS WOODWARD.

Is there any real occasion for my leaving?

MRS. PARBURY.

Haven't you sufficient delicacy of feeling left to teach you that?

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Warmly.*] I don't think I need lessons of delicacy of feeling from you. [*Slight pause.*] I'm sorry I said that, and it means a great deal for me to say I'm sorry. I'm sorry too about the photograph. I think it all might be forgotten.

MRS. PARBURY.

Forgotten!

MISS WOODWARD.

After all, I'm only a girl; and I've worked very hard for Mr. Parbury. I think you might be more lenient.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*At fireplace.*] I'm very sorry for you, Miss Woodward; but I owe a duty to myself and to my husband. You must go in the morning.

[*She moves to return to garden.*

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Crosses to* L.C.] Mrs. Parbury!

MRS. PARBURY.

Well?

MISS WOODWARD.

I suppose I ought to be a lady and go, because you, the mistress of the house, wish me to. But I

don't feel a bit like a lady just now. I only feel like a poor girl whose chances in life are being ruined for a very small and innocent folly.

MRS. PARBURY.

Well, what does all this mean?

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Fiercely.*] It means that I am in Mr. Parbury's employment, not yours, and that I will take my dismissal from him only.

MRS. PARBURY.

Oh, I can promise you that. [*She calls into the garden.*] Clement!

[*Exit* MRS. PARBURY *to garden*, R.

[MISS WOODWARD *throws a hard look after her. Then her eyes fall on the broken cup and saucer. She stoops, collects the fragments, and puts them in waste-paper basket. Then she goes to desk, sits and works on proof sheets as before.*

Enter MR. *and* MRS. PARBURY, R.

PARBURY.

Working again, Miss Woodward! Really, you are indefatigable!

MISS WOODWARD.

I'm only correcting these proof sheets.

MRS. PARBURY.

No doubt Miss Woodward wishes to finish the work to-night, as she is leaving to-morrow.

PARBURY.

Leaving to-morrow?

MISS WOODWARD.

I think Mrs. Parbury is mistaken.

PARBURY.

[*To* MRS. PARBURY.] What do you mean, dear?

MRS. PARBURY.

I wish her to go.

PARBURY.

Why?

MRS. PARBURY.

I can't tell you. It is not a thing you would understand. It is simply impossible for her to remain. In her heart she knows I am right.

[*Slight pause.* PARBURY *goes to* MISS WOODWARD.

PARBURY.

Are you satisfied here?

MISS WOODWARD.

Perfectly.

PARBURY.

You have no wish to go away?

MISS WOODWARD.

Not while you wish me to remain.

PARBURY.

Do you know why my wife wishes you to go?

MISS WOODWARD.

Yes.

PARBURY.

Will you kindly tell me?

MISS WOODWARD.

I'm sorry I can't. I've promised. But—[*with a look at* MRS. PARBURY]—I don't think that Mrs. Parbury's reasons are adequate.

[*Pause.* PARBURY *is thoughtful.*

PARBURY.

[*To* MRS. PARBURY.] Have you anything more to say?

MRS. PARBURY.

I have only to repeat that it is quite impossible for Miss Woodward to stay.

PARBURY.

Well, I have made up my mind that there is something very foolish under all this, and I shall not allow it to deprive me of Miss Woodward's services. [MRS. PARBURY *looks surprised.*] I don't mind saying in her presence that she is invaluable to me. I should never be able to replace her. [*Sense of relief on* MISS WOODWARD'S *part.*] Now, come. [*Looking from one to the other.*] What is it? A tiff—a stupid misunderstanding? Oh, you women, why will you fuss about little things? Make it up, do. Think of "The Roll of Ages." Shake hands, cry, embrace, kiss, or whatever your pet method may be. Weep if you like, though personally I'd rather you didn't. Anyway, as far as I am concerned, the incident is closed. [*He turns to go.*

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Doggedly.*] Miss Woodward leaves this house in the morning.

PARBURY.

[*Looks at his wife for a moment, then turns to* MISS WOODWARD.] Miss Woodward, would you be so very kind—

[*He opens the door for her with great courtesy.* MISS WOODWARD *bows, and exits* L. *He comes to* C.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Turning to him with assumed brightness.*] Now, darling, it will be different. Of course, I couldn't say much before her. You were quite right to be nice and courteous to her now she is going.

PARBURY.

But I assure you she is not.

[*They are* C. MRS. PARBURY *takes his arm caressingly.*

MRS. PARBURY.

But she is—believe me, she is. Of course, we don't want to be hard on her, and she shall have a month's salary and a strong recommendation.

PARBURY.

[*Disengaging his arm.*] My dear Mabel, I absolutely refuse to act in the dark. I hate mysteries. If you care to tell me what all this bother is about, I'll judge for myself what's the right thing to do.

[*Sits on sofa.*

MRS. PARBURY.

I can't—it's impossible. There are some things that men can't be trusted to know about. You must leave this matter to me. [*Sits next him.*

PARBURY.

That I quite decline to do.

[*She again takes his arm and talks rapidly, gradually rather hysterically, towards the end appearing about to cry.*

MRS. PARBURY.

Darling, do listen. You don't understand. You have never been like this with me before. I'm sure I'm not asking very much. You can easily get another secretary. Another time you shall have a man one, as you originally wanted to. You were right, dear—you often are. [PARBURY *rises; crosses to R.* MRS. PARBURY *follows him.*] Darling, do be reasonable. I've been a good wife to you, haven't I? I've always respected your wishes, and not bothered you more than I could help. This is only a little thing, and you must let me have my own way. You must trust me absolutely, dear. You know anything I would do would only be for your good, for you know that I love you. [*She takes out her handkerchief.*] I adore you, darling. You must give way—you must—you must!

PARBURY.

[*Stepping back from her.*] If you cry I shall leave the room. [*Sits* R. *Begins to write.*

MRS. PARBURY.

[*With her back to the audience, in a low voice.*] I wasn't going to cry.

PARBURY.

I'm glad to hear it.

[MRS. PARBURY *puts her handkerchief away and turns.*

MRS. PARBURY.

I had no intention of crying, dear. [PARBURY *still writes. Pause. She comes to desk.*] Shall I write out an advertisement for you, dear?

PARBURY.

What for?

MRS. PARBURY.

For a new secretary—a man.

PARBURY.

No. My mind's made up. I shall not change my secretary.

MRS. PARBURY.

Clement!

PARBURY.

[*Rises and goes to her.*] Listen, my dear Mabel. Perhaps I'm a good deal to blame for the pain you are going to suffer now, and I'm very sorry for you; in many ways you are the best little woman in the world. I've been weak and yielding, and I've gradually allowed you to acquire a great deal more power than you know how to use wisely.

MRS. PARBURY.

Really, Clement, you must be raving.

PARBURY.

Listen, my dear, listen. What's been the result? You've taken from me my habits. You've taken from me my friends. You've taken from me my clubs. You've taken from me my self-esteem, my joy in life, my high spirits, the cheery devil that God implanted in me; but, damn it, you must leave me my secretary.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Excitedly walking the stage.*] Oh, I understand now. You use this exaggerated language, you make these cruel accusations, you work yourself into a passion, because you have grown to think more of Miss Woodward than of me.

PARBURY.

Now you know that to be a purely fantastic interpretation of what I said. [*She takes out handkerchief.*] I observe with pain, too, that you are about to cry again.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Puts handkerchief up her sleeve, controls her anger, and becomes very determined.*] You are quite wrong. Probably I shall never again know the relief of tears. Your callousness and obstinacy seem to have dried up all the tenderness in me. Miss Woodward leaves this house in the morning, or *I* leave it to-night.

PARBURY.

[*Coming to her.*] Oh, come, come, Mabel, that is too ridiculous.

MRS. PARBURY.

I'm very, very serious. Please, for your own sake, understand that. Which is it to be?

PARBURY.

There, dear, let's drop it now. Don't you think domestic squabbles like this, besides being boring, are just a little—may one say it, vulgar? Let's go back to the garden.

MRS. PARBURY.

Which is it to be?

PARBURY.

[*Shrugs his shoulders.*] Of course, you know I'm decided. Miss Woodward stays.

MRS. PARBURY.

Very well. [*She goes to bell* L. *of fireplace and rings.* PARBURY *goes up, takes a book, and negligently turns over the leaves, secretly, however, watching his wife. Pause until*

Enter EVANS, L.

MRS. PARBURY.

Where is Caroline?

EVANS.

She's in her room, ma'am.

MRS. PARBURY.

Send her to me, please.

EVANS.

Yes, ma'am! [*Exit* EVANS, L.

MRS. PARBURY.

I needn't keep you from your friend, Mr. Gunning, any longer.

PARBURY.

I'm all right here, dear; I'm perfectly contented. [*He turns over leaves.*] There is such a wise passage here. I'd like to read it to you. [*She makes a gesture of irritation.*] No! Well, it must keep.

Enter CAROLINE, L.

MRS. PARBURY.

Caroline, I shall want you to pack a few things for me.

CAROLINE.

What shall you want, ma'am?

MRS. PARBURY.

I'll come upstairs and show you.

CAROLINE.

Yes, ma'am. [*Exit* CAROLINE, L. *Slight pause.*

PARBURY.

[*Rising from his leaning attitude against table up stage, putting down the book, and coming down two steps.*] You foolish little woman. You know this is impossible. Be reasonable.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Firmly.*] Which is it to be?

PARBURY.

[*With a gesture conveys that the subject is closed and returns to his former attitude.*] I think I have a right to ask what you propose doing.

MRS. PARBURY.

I propose going home with my father.

[*The laugh of the* COLONEL *is heard in the garden. Then he appears at the entrance, still laughing.* GUNNING *appears behind him. The* COLONEL *enters.* GUNNING *remains at the window smoking.*

COLONEL.

[*To* PARBURY.] That's really the funniest thing I've heard for years. Have you heard that story, Clement?

PARBURY.

What story?

COLONEL.

Story of—[*Then he sees* MRS. PARBURY.] Oh, quite a drawing-room story, believe me, dear.

MRS. PARBURY.

Father, I wish to speak to you.

COLONEL.

Certainly, dear. What is it?

[*Crosses to sofa*, L. *Sits.* PARBURY *exchanges a look with* GUNNING.

GUNNING.

[*Coming down quickly.*] Mrs. Parbury, I must re-

luctantly say good-night. Your charming house is almost in the country, and I've to get back to London. I thank you for——

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Interrupting.*] Please don't go, Mr. Gunning. It's quite early, and Clement and you, as such *very old* friends, must still have a great deal to talk about.

PARBURY.

[*Taking* GUNNING'S *arm.*] No, George, you really mustn't go. [*Leads him up to window,* R.

GUNNING.

I assure you, my dear chap——

PARBURY.

[*Interrupting.*] But I make it a personal favour. Dear student of life, stay and observe.

[*They remain up at window.*

MRS. PARBURY.

Dear father, I wish you to take me home with you to-night.

COLONEL.

[*Surprised.*] Certainly, dear, but——

MRS. PARBURY.

Don't question me. [*Puts her hand on his shoulder.*] You love me, don't you?

COLONEL.

Naturally, my dear. But nowadays, of course, I take second place.

MRS. PARBURY.

I thought so too, but I was wrong. Wait for me a few minutes.

COLONEL.

[*Hesitatingly, after glancing at* PARBURY *and again at his daughter.*] One moment, Mabel. This is all so sudden.

MRS. PARBURY.

Father, do you hesitate to receive me?

COLONEL.

Good heavens, no! But Clement——

MRS. PARBURY.

Shhh! [*Puts her hand over his mouth.*

COLONEL.

Oh! I was thinking, my dear, that unfortunately there is no mother to receive you now. I'm only an old bachelor, and you'll be—er—give me a word.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Kisses him, and goes to door,* L. *She looks across the room at her husband, and then whispers to herself.*] He'll never let me go. [*Exit,* L.

PARBURY.

[*To* GUNNING.] She'll not go, my dear fellow.

GUNNING.

Humph! You think not? Anyway, *I* must.

PARBURY.

Don't.

GUNNING.

The domestic atmosphere is volcanic, and I feel remorseful.

PARBURY.

Nonsense, it had to come. You must see me through it now.

GUNNING.

How beastly selfish you married men are!

[*They come down.*

COLONEL.

Clement, I'm in a difficulty.

PARBURY.

You mean about Mabel, Colonel?

COLONEL.

Yes.

PARBURY.

She proposes going home with you.

COLONEL.

Yes.

PARBURY.

[*Smiling confidently.*] I don't think she'll go.

Enter EVANS, L.

EVANS.

[*To* COLONEL.] Your carriage, sir. [PARBURY *looks uneasy.*] [*Exit* EVANS, L.

COLONEL.

[*Whistles. Looks at his watch.*] I think she means

it. I ordered my man to wait in the Avenue till he was called. Mabel has evidently had him called.

[PARBURY *is thoughtful.*

COLONEL.

I don't wish to be in the least degree meddlesome; but, well, there it is!

PARBURY.

The question, I suppose, is what's it all about?

COLONEL.

Well, yes. I suppose that's it; although I don't in the least wish to know.

PARBURY.

You hear, George; what's it all about?

GUNNING.

[*Down* R., *almost angrily.*] Now, how the deuce should I know? Colonel, you would be very kind if you would use your authority to prevent Clement dragging me into his domestic difficulties. Married men have a cowardly way of endeavouring to involve their friends. Perhaps you have noticed it.

COLONEL.

I have, Mr. Gunning. My experience of married life extended over a period of twenty-six years.

GUNNING.

May one discreetly express the hope that they were very happy years?

COLONEL.

Very happy years, with, however, I must admit,

intermittent troubles. Mabel's mother was one of the best women in the world, but, if I may say so without disloyalty, she was just a little—a little—er—give me a word.

PARBURY.

Would the word *exigeant* apply?

COLONEL.

Admirably. Perhaps you have noticed in Mabel the slightest tendency? Eh?

PARBURY.

Well, well!

COLONEL.

Her mother's jealousy, too, was something amazing. I hope I'm not conceited, but in those days I was just a little—er—popular, and perhaps I ought not to confess it, a little—er—give me a word.

GUNNING.

Human. [*They laugh slightly.*

COLONEL.

[*With affected severity.*] Clement, I hope you are not too human?

PARBURY.

Quite the contrary, I assure you, Colonel.

COLONEL.

Then why—I suppose, after all, it is my duty to ask—why does Mabel come home with me to-night?

PARBURY.

She is simply using pressure to get her own way in a matter in which I think her way the wrong way.

COLONEL.

Gad! they do like their own way, don't they? Well, no doubt she'll be more reasonable to-morrow. I think I may trust you.

PARBURY.

You may—absolutely.

Enter MRS. PARBURY. *She has put on a hat and a cloak.*

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Going to* GUNNING.] You'll forgive me, I'm sure, Mr. Gunning. Good-night. You'll have Clement all to yourself.

GUNNING.

Good-night, Mrs. Parbury.

[*They shake hands.* PARBURY *joins her*, C.

PARBURY.

[*In a low voice.*] Don't go, Mabel. It's very foolish.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Softening.*] You could prevent me if you wished.

PARBURY.

I'm opposed to all violence.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Hard again.*] Which way is it to be?

PARBURY.

[*Firmly.*] My way, dear. [*Goes up* C. *to fireplace.*

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Alone*, C.] Good heavens! He'll really let me go. [*Hesitates for a moment, then draws herself up.*] Come, father.

COLONEL.

Good-night, Mr. Gunning. Good-night, Clement.

PARBURY *and* GUNNING.

Good-night, Colonel.

[*Exeunt* MRS. PARBURY *and the* COLONEL.

PARBURY.

[*Comes down, a little astonished.*] By Jove, she's really going!

[GUNNING *sits.* PARBURY *stands* C., *listening. Pause. Then there is the noise of a carriage door being shut.*

EVANS.

[*Outside.*] Home!

[PARBURY *somewhat unsteadily lights a cigarette. He then catches* GUNNING'S *eye. They look at each other.*

Slow Curtain.

END OF ACT II.

ACT III

SCENE.—*The Rose Garden at* PARBURY'S *house. A garden table, seat, and chairs. The next morning.*

[*Enter* MISS WOODWARD. *She is dressed simply, but less severely than before. Her hair is dressed more loosely. She carries a little basket full of roses. She places some roses upon the table, which is laid for two for breakfast. She plucks more roses and fastens them in her dress. Meanwhile she hums an air and conveys the impression of being happier than in the previous Acts.*]

[*Enter* GUNNING, R. *He wears a light morning suit, a round hat and brown boots, and carries a stick and gloves.*]

GUNNING.

Good-morning, Miss Woodward.

MISS WOODWARD.

Good-morning. [*They shake hands.*

GUNNING.

Shall I resist the temptation to pay you a compliment?

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Gathering more roses.*] Yes, please.

GUNNING.

I thought you would say so. All the same, I feel it to be a deprivation.

MISS WOODWARD.

Isn't that remark itself the cloven foot of compliment?

GUNNING.

Eh—well, perhaps it is. I'm sorry.

MISS WOODWARD.

And therefore unlike you.

GUNNING.

Unlike me? What does that mean?

MISS WOODWARD.

That it isn't much in your way to pay women compliments.

GUNNING.

I hope you are doing me an injustice.

MISS WOODWARD.

I don't think so. You haven't a very lofty opinion of women as a sex, have you?

GUNNING.

Pretty well—pretty well; but what makes you think so?

MISS WOODWARD.

I heard you talk, you know, yesterday afternoon.

GUNNING.

Oh yes; one does talk a lot of rot sometimes, doesn't one?

MISS WOODWARD.

Yes. [*Embarrassed pause.*

GUNNING.

Is Mr. Parbury down yet?

MISS WOODWARD.

No. But he is sure to be in a few minutes. He is generally early. Breakfast, as you see, will be served here. Perhaps—perhaps you would rather wait indoors.

GUNNING.

No; I'll stay here if I may. . . . I'm afraid we made rather a late night of it. [*He sits.*

MISS WOODWARD.

Really?

GUNNING.

Three o'clock.

MISS WOODWARD.

You had much to talk of. I envy people with pleasant memories.

GUNNING.

I don't remember that we talked much of old times. I think we talked of the present.

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Rather hardly.*] Then my envy has flown.

GUNNING.

You are right. This affair is rather boring.

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Innocently.*] What affair, Mr. Gunning?

GUNNING.

Miss Woodward, you are a triumph of the inscrutable.

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Leaning on chair*, L.C.] I'm sure that is very clever, because I can't quite understand it.

GUNNING.

Quite seriously, Miss Woodward, you interest me more than any person I have ever met.

MISS WOODWARD.

Do you always say that to girls, Mr. Gunning?

GUNNING.

No. Why?

MISS WOODWARD.

You ought to. I'm sure it's very encouraging.

[*She picks another rose.*

GUNNING.

[*Doubtfully.*] Ahem!

MISS WOODWARD.

Are you quite sure you wouldn't rather wait indoors?

GUNNING.

Oh, quite. I like being here.

MISS WOODWARD.

But I'm sure you find it difficult getting down to one's level. I often think that the very wise must be very lonely.

GUNNING.

[*Rising.*] What an extremely unpleasant remark!

MISS WOODWARD.

I'm sorry. [*She sighs.*] We don't seem to get on very well, do we?

GUNNING.

[*With sincerity and coming close to her.*] I'd like to get on well with you.

[*Pause. They look in each other's faces, both at table.*

GUNNING.

Will you give me a rose?

MISS WOODWARD.

No, Mr. Gunning.

PARBURY.

[*Outside.*] Are you there, George?

[MISS WOODWARD *gets letters from table.*

GUNNING.

Yes.

PARBURY.

[*Outside, to* EVANS.] Serve breakfast.

Enter PARBURY, L.

Good-morning. I hope I haven't kept you waiting. Oh, you are here, Miss Woodward. Good-morning.

[*Looks at the table.*] And you have managed to find us some roses. How very kind of you! [MISS WOODWARD *gives him letters. He runs them over.*] No, no, no, no! Will you kindly see what they're all about? [*She is about to go.*] Oh, not now—after breakfast will do.

MISS WOODWARD.

I have breakfasted, thank you.

PARBURY.

Really! I suppose I'm horribly late. [*Looks at his watch. Then, noticing the roses she carries in her hand.*] How very beautiful they are! Look, George! [*She selects one and hands it to him.*] For me? Thank you. [*He fastens it in his buttonhole.*]

[*Exit* MISS WOODWARD, L.

[*To* GUNNING.] Lovely, isn't it?

GUNNING.

[*Gruffly.*] Yes, it's all right.

PARBURY.

What's the matter? Cross?

GUNNING.

Not at all. But, really, you married men are very tiresome.

PARBURY.

Oh, I see—wanted a rose yourself. Shall I call Miss Woodward back and ask for you?

GUNNING.

Don't trouble. I've done that myself.

PARBURY.

You have? Ha, ha! [*Begins to laugh, but stops*

suddenly.] Oh! [*Holding his head.*] Dear, dear, what a head I have!

GUNNING.

You haven't asked after *my* head.

PARBURY.

[*Sits at table.*] Your pardon. How is it?

GUNNING.

[*Sits at table.*] I'd like to sell it this morning. Do you know, Clement, I'm not quite certain about that whisky of yours.

PARBURY.

I am. It's fifteen years old.

Enter EVANS, L., *with breakfast-tray.*

But you always had a way of mixing your drinks over-night and growling in the morning.

GUNNING.

[*Drawing up his chair.*] Put it at that, if you like. I do know that I always had a way of disliking you particularly in the morning. I regret I don't appear to have grown out of it.

PARBURY.

I'm so glad. I hate being too popular. [EVANS *offers bacon to* MR. PARBURY. *He pushes the dish away.*] Take it away. Have some bacon, George?

[*Takes a piece of toast, looks at it, then puts it down.*

GUNNING.

Thank you. [*Helps himself to bacon.*

[*Exit* EVANS, L., *with bacon dish.*

PARBURY.

I must say I think your display of temper is in the worst possible taste under the circumstances.

GUNNING.

[*Buttering toast.*] What do you mean by "under the circumstances"?

PARBURY.

You know what I mean. How much sleep do you think I've had?

GUNNING.

I'm sure I don't know. What concerns me is that you detained me in this outlandish place—what county is it?—till past three o'clock, and then insisted, with alcoholic tears in your eyes, on my returning to breakfast.

PARBURY.

Tea or coffee?

GUNNING.

Tea—no; coffee—no, neither.

PARBURY.

Have some hot milk? [*Offers him the jug.*

GUNNING.

Ugh! Don't. [*Takes an egg. Shells it.*

PARBURY.

[*Lifts the lid of the tea-pot, then of the coffee-pot, and closes them gently with a look of distaste.*] No, not this morning. Still, we must drink something. What shall it be?

GUNNING.

I am your guest.

PARBURY.

Perhaps we had better split a bottle.

GUNNING.

Please be frank. Do you mean Bass or champagne?

PARBURY.

Champagne, of course. [*He calls loudly.*] Evans! Evans!

EVANS.

[*Outside.*] Yes, sir.

Enter EVANS, L.

PARBURY.

Bring a bottle of champagne.

EVANS.

[*Starting ever so slightly.*] Cham——

PARBURY.

[*Irritably.*] Champagne and glasses.

EVANS.

[*Recovering his composure.*] Yes, sir.

[*Exit* EVANS, L., *wearing a discreet smile.*

PARBURY.

It's a thing I haven't done for years—taken wine in the morning.

GUNNING.

Five years.

PARBURY.

Exactly.

GUNNING.

In what I may venture to describe as the pre-domestic period it was rather a way of yours.

PARBURY.

You mean ours.

GUNNING.

Ours, if you prefer it. Where's the salt?

PARBURY.

There it is, right before your eyes. Why don't you look?

GUNNING.

Pass the mustard, please. What a good chap you were in those days.

PARBURY.

Yes. Strange, you were always——

GUNNING.

Always what?

PARBURY.

Toast?

GUNNING.

Thanks, I've got some. Always what?

PARBURY.

It's quite pleasant out here, isn't it?

GUNNING.

Delightful. You were saying I was always——

PARBURY.

Oh, it doesn't matter.

GUNNING.

Of course, being about me it wouldn't matter.

PARBURY.

I'm afraid of offending you.

GUNNING.

You couldn't do that.

PARBURY.

Well, I was going to say you were always rather sour-natured.

GUNNING.

Really!

[*He takes up a daily paper and glances through it, continuing to do so while* PARBURY *speaks.*

PARBURY.

And that has, I fancy, quite unconsciously to you, I am sure, a disturbing influence on others of happier nature. [*Taking an egg.*

GUNNING.

[*Drawlingly.*] Yes. [*He continues to read.*

PARBURY.

Take yesterday, for instance. Of course, you didn't intend it. I wouldn't suggest that for a moment. But, damn it, look at the result!

GUNNING.

[*In the same manner as before.*] Yes. [*He reads.*

PARBURY.

[*Taking the top off his boiled egg.*] Simply deplorable. I've broken loose from my moorings. I'm at the mercy of every breeze. I feel that I've lost moral stability. Confound it, why doesn't that champagne come?

Enter EVANS, L., *with champagne. Pours out two glasses and hands them to* GUNNING *and* PARBURY.

PARBURY.

I'm not quite certain that for a man like me—[GUNNING *groans and returns to his newspaper*]—a man, if I may say so, of generous instincts and large sympathies—a groove isn't a good thing, even if it be a little narrow. Of course, for a man of your nature, it's a different matter.

GUNNING.

[*Suddenly puts down the paper, draws his chair closer to the table, and takes an egg with apparent cheerfulness.*] What were you saying, old man?

PARBURY.

Nothing.

GUNNING.

[*Affecting heartiness.*] Let's talk about you.

PARBURY.

[*Fingering the rose in his buttonhole.*] Dear, dear, how cross you are to-day!

EVANS.

Excuse me, sir, may I speak to you?

PARBURY.

Yes—what is it?

EVANS.

It's about cook, sir.

PARBURY.

What's the matter with her?

EVANS.

Well, sir, so to speak, she wants to know where she stands.

PARBURY.

[*Looks at* EVANS, *then at* GUNNING.] How can I help her?

EVANS.

I mean, sir, or rather she means, now mistress has gone away——

PARBURY.

I presume my wife has a right to go away for a few days without cook's permission.

EVANS.

Yes, sir, certainly. But excuse me, sir; there's been gossip. Emma, the 'ousemaid, accidentally overheard something between Mrs. Parbury and her maid. Servants is as nervous as race-horses, sir, and cook's nerves is particularly sensible. So to speak, dismoralisation's set up in the kitchen.

PARBURY.

Well, you had better go and set it down again, Evans, and don't bother me any more.

EVANS.

Yes, sir, certainly. Excuse me, sir, I was to ask you who cook is to take her orders from.

PARBURY.

In my wife's absence, from me, of course.

EVANS.

Not from Miss Woodward, sir?

PARBURY.

[*Staring slightly.*] Why, has Miss Woodward given any orders?

EVANS.

No, sir, but cook thought——

PARBURY.

That will do, Evans.

EVANS.

Yes, sir. [*Exit* EVANS, L.

[*There is a pause.* PARBURY *and* GUNNING *exchange looks.*

GUNNING.

Devilish awkward.

PARBURY.

What bores servants are!

[PARBURY *slowly drinks a glass of wine.* GUNNING *also drinks.* PARBURY *re-fills the glasses.*

Enter COLONEL ARMITAGE, R.

ARMITAGE.

Am I an intruder?

PARBURY.

Good-morning, Colonel. [*He rises and shakes hands.*] Not in the least.

ARMITAGE.

[*At back of table,* C.] Good-morning, Mr. Gunning.

GUNNING.

Good-morning, Colonel. [*They shake hands.*

PARBURY.

Have you breakfasted?

ARMITAGE.

Thanks, yes, but poorly. I didn't get to bed till four.

PARBURY.

Nor did I.

GUNNING.

Nor I.

ARMITAGE.

And then I had but little sleep.

PARBURY.

The same with me.

GUNNING.

And with me.

ARMITAGE.

[*With a touch of asperity.*] Your troubles, Clement, you have, of course, brought upon yourself; but I think it's a little hard on your friends that they should be made to suffer with you.

GUNNING.

Hear, hear!

Enter EVANS *with fruit.* GUNNING *and* PARBURY *each take an apple.*

ARMITAGE.

[*Tapping the champagne bottle with his stick.*] What's this? Some new kind of table water, I suppose.

PARBURY.

Champagne.

ARMITAGE.

Champagne at this hour! Well, I suppose you know best how to regulate your life. Have you an extra glass?

PARBURY.

Another glass, Evans.

EVANS.

Yes, sir. [*Exit* EVANS.

ARMITAGE.

It's a thing I haven't done for many years.

PARBURY.

I trust, Colonel, you won't accuse me of leading you from the path of morning abstinence.

ARMITAGE.

Really, Clement, I think this display of ill-humour is scarcely in—er—give me a word.

GUNNING.

Good taste.

ARMITAGE.

Exactly! Good taste, considering that we are suffering from the effects of your domestic—er—er—

GUNNING.

Maladministration.

ARMITAGE.

Maladministration—exactly.

GUNNING.

I quite agree with you, Colonel.

ARMITAGE.

Look at your friend there. If he'll allow me to say so, he's put on ten years since yesterday. Look at me! Last evening, I suggest—I hope I'm not conceited—I suggest I didn't look a day over forty-seven.

GUNNING.

Not an hour.

ARMITAGE.

While to-day—what would you say, Mr Gunning?

GUNNING.

[*Looks at him critically, then falls back in his chair.*] Fifty-two.

[PARBURY *looks savagely at* GUNNING, *throws his apple on table, and turns away.*

ARMITAGE.

I feared so; but I like you for your frankness.

[*He cuts a cigar.*

Enter EVANS, *with tumbler on tray; he places tumbler on table, and collects the breakfast things. Pause.* ARMITAGE *lights his cigar with a match* EVANS *hands him.*

ARMITAGE.

You haven't asked me if I have a message for you.

PARBURY.

Prenez-garde!

GUNNING.

[*Loudly.*] You mean about Newmarket.

ARMITAGE.

[*After a glance at* EVANS.] Yes; Allerton doesn't run any of his horses. Death in the family, you know.

PARBURY.

So I heard. That will do, Evans. You may leave the champagne. [*They all keep their glasses.*

EVANS.

Yes, sir. [*Exit* EVANS *with breakfast tray,* L.

PARBURY.

[*Watches* EVANS *off; then to* ARMITAGE.] Of course, you know, I'm really most anxious about Mabel. How is she?

ARMITAGE.

I think I told you that I was up practically all night with her.

PARBURY.

Was she ill?

ARMITAGE.

Bodily, no. We supped in the kitchen at two. It's amazing how emotion stimulates the appetite. No, Clement, her indisposition is of the mind. She wept.

PARBURY.

All the time?

ARMITAGE.

All the time. [*Slight pause. Then he adds with a sigh.*] I had rather a trying night.

They all drink champagne; GUNNING *rises, bends over a rose-bush, and hums the air of the music-hall song, "'E 'as my sympathy."*

ARMITAGE.

I'm not without experience. Poor dear Mabel's mother, for instance—one of the best women in the world—*she* would cry at times, and if she got well off the scratch, she was—er—hard to beat. Mind you, I'll be fair; I was much to blame—very much to blame. But as for Mabel, bless you, that dear child could have given her poor mother a stone and —er—what's the expression?

GUNNING.

Romped home.

ARMITAGE.

That's it—romped home.

PARBURY.

Come, Colonel, give me the message.

ARMITAGE.

I have no message for you. I may tell you, you are not in very great favour. [GUNNING *smiles.*] You're not well spoken of, Clement.

PARBURY.

Oho! Perhaps my wife had a good word for my old friend, Gunning.

ARMITAGE.

In regard to Mr. Gunning, I think the word "serpent" was employed. [PARBURY *laughs quietly;* GUNNING *becomes serious.*] All the same, I have a message for him.

GUNNING.

Really.

PARBURY.

[*Rising.*] In that case, I'll get out of the way. I shall be in my study if I'm wanted.

ARMITAGE.

[*Comes* C.] Very well. But I must say, Clement, that I find you, very much to my surprise and regret, just a little—a little—er—give me a word.

GUNNING.

Callous!

ARMITAGE.

Thanks, yes—callous; and, dearly fond as I am of my daughter, I think I have a right to ask how long you intend leaving your wife on my hands.

GUNNING.

Perfectly reasonable—perfectly——

PARBURY.

Shut up, George! [*He goes to* ARMITAGE.] My dear old friend——

ARMITAGE.

[*Interrupting.*] Hear me out, please. My dear daughter is, of course, always more than welcome to my home, but I trust you will not misunderstand me when I say that I require notice. Since I regained my liberty—I mean, since the death of your wife's dear mother, I've drifted into my own—er—little ways. This affair has deranged my plans. Without being indiscreet, I may tell you that I've had to send telegrams.

GUNNING.

Deuced hard lines!

PARBURY.

Send her back to me, Colonel. Consult at once your happiness and mine by using your authority. Tell her that cook is in revolt, and that Evans is impertinent. Tell her that I only want my own way when I know I am absolutely right, as in this case. And above all, tell her that I prefer her society to that of a second-class cynic who bellows for champagne at ten o'clock in the morning. [*Exit* PARBURY, L.

GUNNING.

In regard to your son-in-law, Colonel, you have my respectful sympathy.

ARMITAGE.

A good fellow, but inconsiderate. [*He lowers his voice.*] I may tell you in confidence, Gunning, that I had been looking forward to keeping a rather pleasant appointment to-night——

GUNNING.

[*Falling into the confidential manner.*] Really!

ARMITAGE.

Yes, rather pleasant—rather pleasant.

[*He takes a miniature from his pocket and looks at it.*

GUNNING.

[*Leaning towards him.*] Might one venture to——

ARMITAGE.

[*Keeping the miniature away from him.*] Oh, no, no, no, no—wouldn't be fair. Oh, no. Besides, you might know her hus—you might—er——

GUNNING.

Yes, yes, of course; one can't be too discreet.

ARMITAGE.

[*Quickly.*] Not, mind you, that there's anything the whole world mightn't know, only she—er—she's not happy at home, and a quiet evening at a theatre —you understand?

GUNNING.

Quite, quite!

ARMITAGE.

Now you, my dear fellow, can do me a friendly turn.

GUNNING.

I should be delighted to, but—I don't see——

ARMITAGE.

I'll explain. My daughter wishes to see you. She seems to think that you hold the key of the situation.

GUNNING.

But I don't. I should very much object to.

ARMITAGE.

Never mind—never mind! See her and do your utmost to make it up between her and Clement.

GUNNING.

It's no business of mine.

ARMITAGE.

To put it bluntly, I shall not be able to keep my appointment to-night if I still have my daughter on my hands.

GUNNING.

That would be a pity.

ARMITAGE.

In which case my friend will be vexed—*very vexed.* I should have mentioned that on her mother's side my friend is Spanish.

GUNNING.

[*Smiling. Shakes hands.*] That decides me. Where is your daughter now?

ARMITAGE.

She's there, my boy, quite close. We walked over the heath together. One moment. [*He brings a chair forward.*] Would you kindly lend me your arm? [*With* GUNNING'S *assistance he mounts a chair, then he raises his hat on his stick.*] That's the signal the coast is clear. Trust an old campaigner. There she is! I say, put that wine away! [GUNNING *puts the bottle under table up* L.C., *and places the glasses on table and covers them over with serviette.*] It's all right! Thank you, thank you! [*As* GUNNING *helps him down.*] Remember, my dear fellow, that I've trusted you implicitly. My happiness is in your hands. If we men didn't stand shoulder to shoulder in these little matters, society would—er—would——

GUNNING.

Crumble to dust.

ARMITAGE.

Exactly.

Enter MRS. PARBURY, R. *Advancing cautiously, she bows very stiffly to* GUNNING, *who takes his hat off.*

GUNNING.

Good-morning, Mrs. Parbury.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Coldly.*] Good-morning.

ARMITAGE.

Well, I'll leave you. There's nothing further I can do for you at present, dear?

MRS. PARBURY.

You might stay in the garden and give me a signal if Clement is coming. I have no intention of meeting him under the circumstances.

ARMITAGE.

Very well, I'll give you an unmistakable signal. "I'll sing thee songs of Araby." [*Exit* ARMITAGE, L.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Grimly.*] Well, Mr. Gunning, I hope you're satisfied with your work.

GUNNING.

My work, Mrs. Parbury—come, come!

MRS. PARBURY.

Oh, I hope you won't dispute that. Clement and I were living together in perfect harmony, in perfect happiness, until you turned up yesterday.

GUNNING.

Like a bad penny, eh?

MRS. PARBURY.

I was going to say like the snake in the garden.

GUNNING.

Better still. Our conversation doesn't open propitiously. Don't you think it would conduce to the comfort of us both if we didn't pursue it any further?

MRS. PARBURY.

Isn't that a little cowardly?

GUNNING.

I acknowledge cowardice in regard to other people's affairs.

MRS. PARBURY.

Yesterday you were a hero.

GUNNING.

Believe me, Mrs. Parbury, you are mistaken. I didn't interfere in any way.

MRS. PARBURY.

You did worse.

GUNNING.

How?

MRS. PARBURY.

You sneered.

GUNNING.

Really, Mrs. Parbury, I——

MRS. PARBURY.

You aired opinions to me—pernicious opinions. I have a right to assume that you aired the same opinions to Clement, over whom you have some sort of influence.

GUNNING.

I?

MRS. PARBURY.

Not, I think, a good influence, Mr. Gunning. I've been thinking things over since midnight. Hitherto I've been obliged to think very little of serious things.

Perhaps trouble sharpens the intelligence. I've discovered that your influence over Clement is the influence of ridicule—the ridicule of the untamed for the tamed.

GUNNING.

Say of the disreputable for the respectable, if you like, Mrs. Parbury.

MRS. PARBURY.

Thank you. That quite expresses my present opinion. Of course it is in your power at least to modify it.

GUNNING.

I should be grateful if you would show me the way.

MRS. PARBURY.

You are not sincere.

GUNNING.

'Pon my word, I am. [MRS. PARBURY *raises her hand protestingly.*] No, but really—I assure you, dear Mrs. Parbury—I'm not nearly such a bad fellow as you think. What can I do?

MRS. PARBURY.

Something—*anything* to remove Miss Woodward from this house.

GUNNING.

Miss Woodward! What has she to do with your quarrel with Clement?

MRS. PARBURY.

Everything. Sit down. [*He does so. She makes sure that they are unobserved, then takes a chair next*

him.] Mr. Gunning, strange as it may appear after all that has occurred, I am going to trust you.

[*Lowering her voice.*

GUNNING.

You are very good.

MRS. PARBURY.

That wretched girl is in love with Clement.

GUNNING.

[*Starting from his chair as if shot.*] What!

MRS. PARBURY.

Sit down! Sit down!

GUNNING.

Miss Woodward is in love with——

MRS. PARBURY.

Sit down, *please*, Mr. Gunning.

GUNNING.

[*Laughs—sitting.*] No, no, no; I simply can't believe it.

MRS. PARBURY.

Why not?

GUNNING.

It seems such a monstrous absurdity. [*Laughs.*

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Drawing herself up.*] I see nothing monstrously absurd in any one falling in love with my husband. I did!

GUNNING.

Oh, of course—a charming chap; but she's such an original girl.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Indignant.*] You infer that I am not?

GUNNING.

Not at all, Mrs. Parbury. You are really most interesting.

MRS. PARBURY.

I don't think you are very tactful.

GUNNING.

I'm a boor—a perfect boor.

MRS. PARBURY.

You appear to take an interest in Miss Woodward.

GUNNING.

[*Confused.*] Only the interest of the student. I still think you must be mistaken.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Emphatically.*] I caught her in the act of kissing his photograph.

GUNNING.

You saw her— [*Laughs.*] My dear Mrs. Parbury, a day-dream!

MRS. PARBURY.

A fact. When pressed, she didn't deny it.

GUNNING.

Does Clement know?

MRS. PARBURY.

No; I thought it wise not to tell him.

GUNNING.

[*Heartily.*] You were right—very right.

MRS. PARBURY.

I'm glad you think so.

GUNNING.

Some men are so weak.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Drawing herself up again.*] Mr. Gunning!

GUNNING.

So easily flattered.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*With more emphasis.*] Mr. Gunning!

GUNNING.

In nine cases out of ten it's vanity that leads men astray.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*With growing wrath.*] Mr. Gunning, we are speaking of my husband.

GUNNING.

Yes, yes, dear old Clement has his share of vanity, of course. [*Aside.*] Damn him! [*Rises and goes* L.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Rising indignantly.*] How dare you speak like that of my husband! A less vain man doesn't exist, and

what small faults he has concern only him and me—and not you in any way.

GUNNING.

I beg ten thousand pardons, Mrs. Parbury. Of course you know Clement far better than I do. Please don't go.

MRS. PARBURY.

I shall certainly not remain to hear my husband abused.

GUNNING.

But I assure you——

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Crosses to* L.] Clement vain indeed!

GUNNING.

No, no; a mistake. Do sit down again.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Crosses to* R.C.] You might, with advantage, look for vanity nearer home, Mr. Gunning.

MR. GUNNING.

Perfectly true, perfectly true.

[*He places her chair for her.*

MRS. PARBURY.

As for the sort of weakness you were good enough to credit my husband with——

GUNNING.

Nothing but a slip of the tongue. Do sit down.

MRS. PARBURY.

No doubt you have accustomed yourself to judging other men from your own standpoint.

GUNNING.

That's it; quite true! You are always right. Won't you sit?

[*She sits. He sighs with relief, then takes a chair himself.*

MRS. PARBURY.

What do you propose?

GUNNING.

I'm waiting for a suggestion from you.

MRS. PARBURY.

This brazen hussy——

GUNNING.

That expression seems to me to be unnecessarily harsh, Mrs. Parbury.

MRS. PARBURY.

Oh, of course, if you defend the girl—

GUNNING.

Pardon me, but I have an old-fashioned prejudice against speaking ill of the absent.

MRS. PARBURY.

I didn't observe it when you spoke of my husband.

GUNNING.

[*Laughing.*] Fairly hit. Come, let's be practical.

Miss Woodward must not remain in the house, and Clement must not know the truth. On these points we are quite agreed.

MRS. PARBURY.

Quite.

GUNNING.

Very well. I'll see Clement. I have an idea.

[*Rises.*

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Rises.*] You'll not tell him you've seen me.

GUNNING.

Certainly not.

MRS. PARBURY.

Remember above all, it's most important to our future happiness that Clement should be the first to give way.

GUNNING.

Oh, I'll remember that.

MRS. PARBURY.

And, Mr. Gunning, if you succeed I'll try to forget the mischief you've created, and will ask you to come and see us—[*shakes hands with him*]—occasionally.

GUNNING.

Thank you so much.

[*Voice of* COLONEL ARMITAGE *outside singing "I'll sing thee songs of Araby."*

MRS. PARBURY.

That's father's signal. I am going to walk on the heath. I'm far too proud to allow myself to be dis-

covered by Clement here. He might think I want to come back. [*Exit* MRS. PARBURY, R.

[*Voice of* ARMITAGE, *still singing, comes nearer until he enters with* PARBURY, *with the words "or charm thee to a tear." Unseen by* PARBURY, GUNNING *points out to the* COLONEL *the direction in which* MRS. PARBURY *has gone.*

ARMITAGE.

[*In a low voice, to* GUNNING.] Will it be all right?

GUNNING.

I hope so.

ARMITAGE.

[*Going* R.] Well, I'll finish my constitutional. I'll look in again, Clement, in the hope that you will then be able to tell me how long this extremely uncomfortable state of affairs is to last.

[*Exit* ARMITAGE, R., *singing until he is well off.*

PARBURY.

Give me a cigarette, George.

[GUNNING *hands him a cigarette, then takes a cigarette himself. They both smoke. There is a short silence.*

PARBURY.

Not a stroke of work. It's absurd!

[*Throws cigarette on ground in a rage.*

GUNNING.

You are not happy?

PARBURY.

Not particularly.

GUNNING.

Then how can you expect to do imaginative work?

PARBURY.

Quite so!

GUNNING.

I'm afraid you've made a mistake, old chap.

PARBURY.

Eh?

GUNNING.

You know I'm your friend.

PARBURY.

Of course.

GUNNING.

Apart from all chaff.

PARBURY.

Yes, yes.

GUNNING.

Well, you've gone too far.

PARBURY.

[*Looks at him.*] You think so?

GUNNING.

Yes. By a petulant discontent you've precipitated an awkward crisis.

PARBURY.

You see it now in that light.

GUNNING.

Yes. I've been thinking things over, Clement. [*Sits on front of table*, C.] After all, the love of a good woman is a priceless possession.

PARBURY.

You appear to have dropped into the platitudinous.

GUNNING.

[*With much gravity.*] Don't jest, old man, over so sacred a thing.

PARBURY.

[*After eyeing* GUNNING *keenly for a moment.*] You have changed your views since yesterday.

GUNNING.

Only the unimaginative never change their views.

PARBURY.

You think, then, I've been wrong?

GUNNING.

Very!

PARBURY.

I should have gone on putting up with the existing conditions?

GUNNING.

They might have been worse.

PARBURY.

Submitting to the old tyranny?

GUNNING.

A wholesome discipline, believe me.

PARBURY.

What of our spoilt yachting cruise?

GUNNING.

I ought never to have proposed it. Think what a loving wife must suffer under the circumstances—lying awake at night listening to the wind howling in the chimneys and sobbing in the trees. It doesn't bear thinking of.

PARBURY.

Quite so—quite so! And about our dear old friends whom I was obliged to drop. You may remember you made some very strong comments on my weakness yesterday.

GUNNING.

I was hasty. I admit it.

PARBURY.

Wybrow, for instance—an awful good chap.

GUNNING.

A tavern wit—a Johnsonian spirit—eminently out of place on the domestic hearth.

PARBURY.

Well, take Carson—one of the best.

GUNNING.

Foolishly married a woman your wife couldn't get on with. You admitted it.

PARBURY.

But Burleigh—a truly great spirit—your own words.

GUNNING.

Burleigh? It isn't because a man gives you a watch that you need thrust him down your wife's throat, is it?

PARBURY.

What an old fraud you are, George!

GUNNING.

Not at all. One sees things more clearly in the morning.

PARBURY.

Well, since you've resigned your attitude of non-intervention, what do you advise?

GUNNING.

Discreet surrender.

PARBURY.

I'm to send for my wife?

GUNNING.

Exactly.

PARBURY.

Unconditionally?

GUNNING.

Of course. Why impose conditions on a weak, loving, trusting woman? [*Going to him.*] Damn it all, old man, show a little heart.

PARBURY.

You know it means the sacrifice of my secretary?

GUNNING.

Well?

PARBURY.

Well?

GUNNING.

[*A little embarrassed; he drops his cigarette and places his foot on it.*] It's obvious that Miss Woodward can't stay on here in your wife's absence.

PARBURY.

I've thought of that.

GUNNING.

You heard what Evans said. The servants are talking already—and if the servants are talking this morning the neighbours will be talking this afternoon, and the entire north-west of London by the evening.

PARBURY.

Quite true—quite true!

GUNNING.

I suppose you don't wish to compromise the girl?

PARBURY.

Certainly not—certainly not! [*He goes slowly over* GUNNING, *and looks him in the face, smiling.*] And so that's your secret.

GUNNING.

What do you mean?

PARBURY.

All this solicitude for my happiness—this sudden change of your point of view—this miraculous conversion of the cynic into the peacemaker—all inspired

by a pair of blue eyes. An arrow from Cupid's bow has winged its way into this wooden heart—[*Tapping* GUNNING'S *chest*]—and "Earth has won her child again," as Goethe puts it.

GUNNING.

Don't talk rot!

PARBURY.

Don't be offended. I like it. It pleases me. Think of it! One dull evening in a suburban home, one morning's encounter in a rose-garden, and the thing's done—the sage melts into the man, the onlooker into the soldier. I tell you I like it. It's so natural, so human—so splendidly unlike you. Let me help. What can I do? She's coming here now with some letters for me to sign. "Were it ever so airy a tread, your heart would hear her and beat." Isn't it so? Shall I speak to her for you? Better still, shall I leave you alone together?

GUNNING.

[*Fixing his hat on more firmly and taking his stick.*] I'm going. You bore me.

Enter MISS WOODWARD, L. *She carries some typewritten letters and pen and ink. She goes to the table and stands waiting for* PARBURY.

PARBURY.

One moment, old man. [*He looks in* GUNNING'S *face, then speaks in a lower voice.*] Don't let it pass unrecorded. You have permitted yourself a blush.

GUNNING.

[*Trying to pass him.*] Don't be an idiot.

PARBURY.

[*Restraining him.*] It's a beautiful, touching truth. The philosopher—the man who has gained perspective—the student who sits perched on a lofty ledge and looks down pityingly on the rest of us, is actually blushing—blushing a poor, simple, human blush!

[*Laughs loudly.*

GUNNING.

Go to the devil! [*Exit* GUNNING, R.

PARBURY.

[*Turning to* MISS WOODWARD. *He goes to her.*] Forgive my laughter, Miss Woodward, but it isn't often one surprises a philosopher in a blush. Now, let us see! [*He sits and takes the letters.* MISS WOODWARD *remains standing by him. He reads. Interrupting himself after a moment, he laughs slightly.*] Dear old George! [*He continues reading, then signs the letter. He looks over another and says "Excellent!" and signs it. Then he quickly signs the other letters, sits back in his chair, and says*] Thank you! [MISS WOODWARD *gathers up the letters.*] I'm afraid that's all the work I can do to-day. I'd like to have gone on with the novel, but it seems the mood won't come.

MISS WOODWARD.

I'm very sorry.

PARBURY

The day is out of joint.

MISS WOODWARD.

I wish I could do something.

PARBURY.

No, no, don't you trouble. It'll all come right

presently. By the way, what a good fellow Gunning is!

MISS WOODWARD.

Is he?

PARBURY.

Don't you think so? [*Looking at her.*

MISS WOODWARD.

I've seen so little of him; but I'm sure he must be if you think so. [*She is going,* L.

PARBURY.

Wait one moment, Miss Woodward. I know there was something else I wanted to say to you. [*She comes back.*] [*He rises and paces stage thoughtfully.*] Oh, yes; I know! I'm afraid my domestic complications have made things a little uncomfortable for you here.

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Astonished, drops the letters on the table.*] I don't —don't understand.

PARBURY.

I mean that you probably feel it rather awkward to actually live—night and day in the house in my wife's absence?

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Blankly.*] Oh, yes, yes; quite I suppose.

PARBURY.

[*Not looking at her.*] I don't know much about these matters; but I do know that you women are very sensitive, and apt to worry about what people might say.

MISS WOODWARD.

[*In the same manner as before.*] Yes—of course.

PARBURY.

I thought so. Well, it has occurred to me that perhaps under present circumstances it would be better if——

MISS WOODWARD.

You mean for me to go away.

PARBURY.

Yes. [*Pause.*

MISS WOODWARD.

[*In a low voice.*] If I had been wiser I would have expected it.

PARBURY.

I mean, of course, to sleep only. Mrs. Howlands at Parkhurst House just down here lets some of her rooms I know, and probably she has a vacant bedroom now. I'll send down presently and see what can be done. In fact, I'll send Evans now.

[*Is about to go* L.

MISS WOODWARD.

Mr. Parbury!

PARBURY.

[*Stopping.*] Yes.

MISS WOODWARD.

Don't send, please.

PARBURY.

Oh, I see; you would rather go yourself.

MISS WOODWARD.

I would rather go altogether.

PARBURY.

[*Amazed.*] You would rather go altogether?

MISS WOODWARD.

I mean I *will* go altogether.

PARBURY.

Miss Woodward, what is this for? What have I done?

MISS WOODWARD.

Nothing that hasn't been perfect kindness to me.

PARBURY.

Then why wish to go now? I know I can't expect to have you always, because you will some day get married.

MISS WOODWARD.

I shall never get married.

PARBURY.

Nonsense! Of course you will, and the man who gets you will, in my opinion, be a very lucky fellow; but until that day I certainly looked forward to having the benefit of your services.

MISS WOODWARD.

I'm sorry if I disappoint you. Please forgive me and let me go.

PARBURY.

But really, Miss Woodward, I must beg for some

sort of explanation. Last night you acknowledged you were perfectly satisfied. You wished to remain.

MISS WOODWARD.

You have unconsciously shown me to-day that I was wrong.

PARBURY.

Indeed! I would be glad to know how. Oh, how weary one gets of mysteries! [MISS WOODWARD'S *head droops lower.*] [*He walks the stage, then looks at* MISS WOODWARD *and pauses; he goes to her and speaks more gently.*] I beg your pardon, I fear I spoke impatiently. Do understand that I only wish for your own good. I admit in our relations I've hitherto been rather selfish. I'm afraid writing men are prone to be so. I've allowed you to study my wishes and feelings and nerves all the time, without giving any thought to yours. I'll try to be more considerate in the future if you'll only regard me as an elder brother and tell me what is troubling you now.

MISS WOODWARD.

I'm sorry, but I can't. I'm ashamed that you should worry about me at all.

PARBURY.

Is it anything to do with Mr. Gunning?

MISS WOODWARD.

Nothing at all. How could it be?

PARBURY.

Miss Woodward, I don't like to press you, but this general cloud of mystery is seriously affecting

my nerves. At least tell me—I make it a personal favour—the cause of the quarrel between my wife and you.

MISS WOODWARD.

It's impossible! Mrs. Parbury may tell you after I've gone. I'd rather you despised me then than now.

PARBURY.

[*Wonderingly.*] Despise you?

[*Their eyes meet. Pause.*

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Passionately.*] Please don't—don't even try to guess.

PARBURY.

[*The light breaking in on him slowly.*] I think I understand.

[MISS WOODWARD *turns up stage and stands with head bowed, her back to the audience. There is a long pause. At first* PARBURY *doesn't appear ill-pleased. He looks down at the rose in his buttonhole, and begins to raise it half-tenderly to his face. Then his face becomes grave, and he slowly removes the flower from his coat, and places it on the table against which* MISS WOODWARD *is standing. He takes one of her hands.*

PARBURY.

I don't ask anything—I don't guess anything, my dear child—my little sister. I was wrong to press you to tell me your trouble; for what could a

hardened, rough-natured man do with the secrets of a young girl's heart?

MISS WOODWARD.

Don t speak like that; only say that I may go.

PARBURY.

Yes. [*Goes up* C.

MISS WOODWARD.

Thank you.

[*Sees the rose where he has placed it. After a slight pause she takes it up. During the following, she slowly picks it to pieces, dropping the petals on the ground.*

PARBURY.

[*Coming down to back of table and speaking very gently.*] I suppose there must soon come a time to every girl of heart who goes out alone into the world—a time when life seems to press hardly upon her and weariness of the unaccustomed stress makes her heart falter, and when she longs to take rest for a time in the old childhood, in the home she perhaps once thought to be dull and dreary, in the mother's arms that have always been ready to open with love for her.

MISS WOODWARD.

Don't!

[*Sinks into chair*, R.C.; *buries her face in her hands.*

PARBURY.

Perhaps you feel that that time has come now.

If so, go home for a little while, and get rest and fresh strength for the battle of life. Come back to the fight soon. You are bound to succeed, because you have talent and ambition and courage. [*Slight pause. He takes her hand*]. Don't cry. There is nothing you have lost or suffered yet quite worth a tear—

Enter MRS. PARBURY, R., GUNNING, *and* ARMITAGE.

—nothing quite worth a tear. [*He is bending towards her.*]

[MRS. PARBURY, *who is slightly in advance of* ARMITAGE *and* GUNNING, *stops near* MISS WOODWARD *and* PARBURY, *brought up short by seeing their intimate position.* PARBURY *draws back from* MISS WOODWARD, *who remains upright and motionless.* GUNNING *and* ARMITAGE, *who exchange glances, remain* L. MISS WOODWARD *crosses* L. *to go.*

MRS. PARBURY.

[*In a low voice, speaking slowly, with deep emotion.*] I suppose—I have still a right to ask—for some explanation?

PARBURY.

Of what, dear?

MRS. PARBURY.

Of this familiarity.

PARBURY.

You shouldn't mistake sympathy for familiarity. I was only giving Miss Woodward some advice about her affairs.

MRS. PARBURY.

What affairs?

PARBURY.

I said *her* affairs, dear, not ours.

MRS. PARBURY.

If that is all the explanation—— [*Turns away* L.

MISS WOODWARD.

Mr. Parbury very kindly and very properly advised me to go home for a time—[*She comes down to* MRS. PARBURY *and speaks to her alone*]—and I—I descended to your level—I cried!

Quick Curtain.

END OF ACT III.

ACT IV

SCENE.—*Same as Acts I. and II.*
Same day as Act III.

[*Upon the curtain rising,* MISS WOODWARD *is discovered at the desk. A luncheon gong is immediately heard.* MISS WOODWARD *looks up and listens for a moment, then shrugs her shoulders and resumes her work. She opens a drawer of the desk, glances at its contents, and then writes.*]

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Writing.*] Drawer four. Reviews favourable of "Harvey Masterton." In top corner, tied in bundle, reviews unfavourable. [*She closes and locks that drawer and unlocks another, into which she looks. Writing.*] Drawer five. Proof sheets of new novel corrected to page 180. At back, accounts with publishers. [*The luncheon gong is struck again. She opens another drawer, looks into it for a moment, turns over its contents, then shrugs her shoulders and writes.*] A variety of photographs of Mrs. Parbury and two packets of letters marked "Private." How touching! [*She closes the drawer with a bang, and opens another.*]

Enter EVANS, L.

EVANS.

[C.] Excuse me, Miss, but have you heard the luncheon gong?

MISS WOODWARD.

Yes, thank you.

EVANS.

It's been struck twice, specially for you, Miss.

MISS WOODWARD.

Who told you to strike it the second time?

EVANS.

Mr. Parbury, Miss.

MISS WOODWARD.

And who sent you now?

EVANS.

Mrs. Parbury asked me to tell you they're at lunch. They're the only words that's been spoken since they sat down. It's rather trying to the nerves, Miss, waiting on people that only open their mouths to eat.

MISS WOODWARD.

You will please say that I don't wish any lunch.

EVANS.

Yes, Miss.

MISS WOODWARD.

Has Emma packed my things?

EVANS.

She's packing them now, Miss.

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Glancing at an A.B.C. which is on the desk.*] Will

you please order a cab for me at—let me see—[*consulting the book*]—four-twenty—say at half-past three.

EVANS.

Yes, Miss. Excuse me, Miss, but we're all very sorry you're going—particularly cook. Cook's very strong in her attachments.

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Looking into a drawer.*] It's very kind of cook.

EVANS.

Cook's words was, "This'll be a dull 'ouse when the little sunbeam's gone."

MISS WOODWARD.

That will do, Evans.

EVANS.

Excuse me, Miss, it was meant kindly. We was all on your side in this embroglo.

[*A pause.* MISS WOODWARD *is obstinately silent, and goes on working.*

EVANS.

Can't I get you something, Miss?

MISS WOODWARD.

Yes; ask cook to kindly make me a sandwich, and I'll have a glass of beer.

EVANS.

Sandwich of mutton or 'am, Miss?

MISS WOODWARD.

Ham, please. [*Exit* EVANS, L.] It's sure to be cold mutton to-night. [*She writes.*] Old manuscripts. [*Closes drawer.*] There, that's all in order for him. [*Rises.*] I know there are some books of mine here. I may as well have them. [*Goes towards book-shelves, but stops when she comes to the occasional table on which is the photo of* MR. PARBURY. *She stretches out her hand and takes the photograph gingerly. Then she looks round to see if she is observed, with to herself an affectation of fear.*] Poor thing! Was it outraged by a kiss! What a shame! But it's all right now! [*Puts it back with care.*] No one shall hurt it. It's perfectly safe—perfectly safe. [*She goes to book-shelf.*] Keats—mine. [*Takes a volume.*] Matthew Arnold—mine.

Enter EVANS *with sandwiches, beer, &c., on a small tray, which he places on the desk.*

Jane Eyre—mine. I think that's all. [*Brings the books down and places them on desk.*] Thank you, Evans. [*She sits.*

EVANS.

Cook thought you would care for that piece of cake, Miss.

MISS WOODWARD.

I would. Thank cook for me.

EVANS.

Yes, Miss. [*He goes to door.*] There's still a hominous silence at the lunch-table, Miss.

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Taking a sandwich.*] That's all right, Evans. [*Exit* EVANS, L.] After all, one must have food. [*She takes a respectable bite out of a sandwich.*] And who could over-estimate the consolations of literature? [*Opens a book and reads.*]

"Is the calm thine of stoic souls who weigh
Life well, and find it wanting, nor deplore,
But in disdainful silence turn away,
Stand mute, self-centred, stern, and dream no more?"

Yes, Mr. Arnold, it is.

[*Takes another bite of a sandwich.*

Enter MRS. PARBURY, L.

MRS. PARBURY.

Why won't you come to lunch, Miss Woodward. But oh, I see you're having something here.

MISS WOODWARD.

[*For a moment slightly confused.*] I—I—[*Drinks some of her beer*]—I have a railway journey before me. [*She rises.*

MRS. PARBURY.

All the more reason you should come and lunch properly.

MISS WOODWARD.

You are very kind, but I am in no mood for merriment.

MRS. PARBURY.

Merriment!

MISS WOODWARD.

Aren't you all merry? I'm so sorry. I thought it would be all right now that I'm going away.

MRS. PARBURY.

I'm afraid that won't make any difference. You speak as though you thought you had a grievance against me.

MISS WOODWARD.

Oh no; I suppose it's the other way about.

MRS. PARBURY.

Perhaps it ought to be, but somehow I don't feel it acutely. I feel only a dull pain. It's a terrible thing, Miss Woodward, for a young married woman to suddenly realise that her happiness is gone. I feel that I have aged many years in the last few hours.

MISS WOODWARD.

So do I. I'm sadder, but healthier.

[*Finishes the beer.*

MRS. PARBURY.

It's so much worse for me.

MISS WOODWARD.

Oh, of course our own troubles are always the worst. That is what has been called "The vanity of grief."

MRS. PARBURY.

Well, Miss Woodward, I'll say good-bye. I bear you no ill-will now—really I don't; and I shall always be glad to hear that you are doing well, although naturally under the circumstances I can hold out no hopes of your coming back here.

MISS WOODWARD.

[*In amazement*] You, Mrs. Parbury, hold out hopes

of my returning here! Do you think there is enough money in the Bank of England to induce me to do that?

MRS. PARBURY.

I didn't mean it unkindly. I was only trying to say a nice womanly thing, and to show you that I didn't blame you so much for falling in love with my husband.

MISS WOODWARD.

I never did.

MRS. PARBURY.

Oh, Miss Woodward, you know I saw you here. [*Pointing to* PARBURY'S *photograph.*] It was the greatest shock of my life.

MISS WOODWARD.

You mean I kissed his photograph?

MRS. PARBURY.

You know you did.

MISS WOODWARD.

[*With a little laugh.*] I suppose I did.

MRS. PARBURY.

Then how can you say——

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Gravely.*] It was a motherly kiss.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Turning away.*] It seems impossible to talk with you. I used to think you a serious-minded person.

MISS WOODWARD.

Please don't go, Mrs. Parbury, I'm quite serious. I'd like to explain. I think I owe it to you.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Turning.*] Well?

MISS WOODWARD.

You will let me be quite frank?

MRS. PARBURY.

Oh, I shall like it.

MISS WOODWARD.

I'm not so sure of that.

MRS. PARBURY.

I'll take the risk. [*Comes down* L., *sits on sofa.*] Go on, please.

MISS WOODWARD.

The interest which I began to take in Mr. Parbury sprang in a way from what has been called the maternal instinct.

MRS. PARBURY.

If you go through the world exercising your maternal instinct on other women's husbands, Miss Woodward, you'll end badly.

MISS WOODWARD.

I don't propose doing so. I'm going home to try it on my sisters.

MRS. PARBURY.

If you had known anything of life, you would have seen that I had sufficient of the maternal instinct for the needs of my husband.

MISS WOODWARD.

I'm very, very sorry; please don't be angry, but I didn't think it found the right expression. It was very impudent of me, I know.

MRS. PARBURY.

Very.

MISS WOODWARD.

It seemed to me that you smoothed his hair when he'd rather it was rough, and roughed it when he'd rather it was smooth. [*Demurely.*] I think that expresses what I mean. I have a beastly sly way of noticing everything, and I began to feel sorry for Mr. Parbury. And being quite as egotistical as most girls, I began to think I should have made him a better wife than you.

MRS. PARBURY.

Oh. [*Rises.*

MISS WOODWARD.

Perhaps in the remotest corner of my heart I think so still.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Indignant.*] Well?

MISS WOODWARD.

But I never loved him—never in the least degree.

[MRS. PARBURY, *during the foregoing, has listened with anger gathering in her face, but at the end, after an apparent momentary struggle with herself, she bursts into laughter.*

MISS WOODWARD.

I'm glad you're not angry.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Still laughing.*] It's impossible to be angry. And so because you thought his wife bored him, you gave his photograph a nice motherly kiss. That was very sweet of you, I'm sure.

MISS WOODWARD.

It was well meant, Mrs. Parbury; and you must always remember that I didn't know you were looking.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Laughing, sits on sofa.*] Why do you make me laugh when you must know that my heart is breaking—that I have lost my happiness for ever. [*Pause. She begins to laugh again. Rises.*] And I thought you a designing hussy, when you are only a very quaint and harmless girl. [*Laughs.*

Enter GUNNING, L.; *keeps the door open.*

GUNNING.

I'm afraid I'm in the way.

MRS. PARBURY.

Not at all. We have said all we had to say to each other. Oh, how that girl has made me laugh!

[*Exit* MRS. PARBURY, L., *laughing.* GUNNING *shuts the door.*

MISS WOODWARD.

Good-bye, Mr. Gunning.

[*Gathering her books together.*

GUNNING.

I want a little talk with you.

MISS WOODWARD.

I'm sorry I can't give you the time.

GUNNING.

Oh yes, you will, Miss Woodward.

MISS WOODWARD.

Indeed! I admit my position is a lowly one, but that doesn't lessen your presumption.

[*Goes towards the door.*

GUNNING.

[*With conviction.*] You won't go.

MISS WOODWARD.

But I will.

GUNNING.

My dear Miss Woodward, believe me, you will not.

MISS WOODWARD.

You don't propose using force, I suppose?

GUNNING.

No; I think you would like me to, but unfortunately this is not our house, and one must observe the convenances.

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Going to door*, L.] Good-bye, Mr. Gunning.

GUNNING.

Moral force will detain you.

MISS WOODWARD.

What moral force, pray? [*Turning.*

GUNNING.

Curiosity. You know you are dying to know what I have to say.

MISS WOODWARD.

Indeed I am not.

GUNNING.

Oh yes, you are. And further, a certain womanly graciousness will prevent your going. You are saying to yourself, "Mr. Gunning has evinced a genuine interest in me. It would be cattish of me to refuse him a few minutes' talk."

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Slowly comes to sofa and puts her books down.*] I certainly don't wish to be cattish.

GUNNING.

Of course not.

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Sits on sofa.*] And anyway I want to piece of cake. Will you pass it, please? [*the plate*] Thank you. I hope you won't eating.

GUNNING.

Not at all. I like it.

MISS WOODWARD.

Not that I fear it would make any diff you did.

GUNNING.

No, certainly not. Go on being natura [*Pause. He watches her nibbling the cake.*] ring for a fresh piece?

MISS WOODWARD.

No, thank you. I'm used to this piece no *glances up at him.*] You needn't be disc Mr. Gunning.

GUNNING.

I'm not a bit.

MISS WOODWARD.

You look it a little.

GUNNING.

Do I?

MISS WOODWARD.

And you know you didn't detain me here me eating cake.

GUNNING.

No, although you do it very nicely. I want to ask you what you think of me.

[*Leaning on back of chair,* R.C.

MISS WOODWARD.

I haven't thought of you.

GUNNING.

Well, I'd like you to begin.

MISS WOODWARD.

I'm afraid I haven't time now.

GUNNING.

It might be to your interest, though I don't say positively that it would be.

MISS WOODWARD.

Explain. [*Turns to him.*

GUNNING.

I think I ought first to tell you something about myself.

MISS WOODWARD.

[*In mock alarm.*] Not the story of your life, surely My cab will be here soon.

GUNNING.

You told me yours last night!

MISS WOODWARD.

You asked me to. I haven't asked you.

GUNNING.

You needn't reproach me for taking an interest in you.

MISS WOODWARD.

I don't; but you make such a fuss about it, as if it were a sort of miracle.

GUNNING.

[*Crossly takes plate from her lap and cake from her hand; puts them on table*, R.] Oh well, I suppose I oughtn't to detain you, Miss Woodward. You are evidently anxious to get back to your twelve sisters and the hat and frock you told me about.

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Rises.*] You needn't throw the family poverty in my face, although it serves me right for giving my confidence to a comparative stranger.

GUNNING.

Miss Woodward, I humbly beg your pardon.

MISS WOODWARD.

Although the home may be grubby, I daresay we are as happy as you. We believe in things, anyway —you don't.

GUNNING.

Don't judge me by a hasty remark. Besides, I had an alternative to suggest.

MISS WOODWARD.

You? You don't want a secretary, do you?

GUNNING.

I—I wanted to tell you in a different way, but you won't let me. I want you as my wife.

MISS WOODWARD.

Your wife, Mr. Gunning?

GUNNING.

It may appear sudden and cold-blooded—but your cab is coming.

MISS WOODWARD.

You've taken my breath away. How exciting it is when it does come. I really don't know what to say. I know there is a usual thing. It isn't "To what am I indebted for this honour," is it?

GUNNING.

I don't know. I've never asked a girl before.

MISS WOODWARD.

We don't know each other in the least.

GUNNING.

That's where we would start with a big advantage. We'd have all the pleasure of finding each other out. Anyway, you are not displeased.

MISS WOODWARD.

Oh no; either way I score. If I say yes, I suppose I'll make a good match.

GUNNING.

Pretty good.

MISS WOODWARD.

And if I say no, I shall at least be able to boast of a proposal.

GUNNING.

That's so.

MISS WOODWARD.

Not that there's much satisfaction in that to a practical mind.

GUNNING.

No? [*Goes to her.*] Try the other.

MISS WOODWARD.

But we don't love each other.

GUNNING.

Another big advantage. Love is the rock upon which so many well-intentioned young persons split. They engage to marry each other while the intelligence is perverted, the reason unbalanced, and the judgment obscured by an overpowering sentiment. They enter into a solemn life-binding contract in a highly emotional and altogether unnormal moral condition. The disastrous results of such folly we see examples of daily. We will escape that snare. [*He comes close to her.*] Of course if the sentiment should subsequently come, if that particular kind of emotion should by chance supervene, we'll deal with it as best we may.

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Sits on arm of sofa.*] Still there must be something in love-making. I remember my sister and the curate seemed to have a very good time. We all thought them fussy, but I know they liked it.

GUNNING.

I made love to you in the garden this morning.

MISS WOODWARD.

Did you? I thought it was pity, and resented it.

GUNNING.

You refused me a rose, and gave one——

MISS WOODWARD.

I refused you because I thought you pitied me, and gave one to Mr. Parbury because I pitied him.

GUNNING.

I'd like you to pity me.

MISS WOODWARD.

I *should* if I said yes. [*Leaves him.*] But I mean to say no.

GUNNING.

[*Following her.*] You are afraid.

MISS WOODWARD.

Of what?

GUNNING.

Of what people call my "nasty sneering way," for instance.

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Confidently.*] Oh, I could deal with that all right.

GUNNING.

I'm sure you could. [*Goes near to her.*] Say yes, Hyacinth.

Enter EVANS, L.

EVANS.

Your cab is here, Miss.

GUNNING.

[*To* MISS WOODWARD, *in low voice.*] Send it away. [*She hesitates.*] Do.

MISS WOODWARD.

Thank you, Evans. Let it wait.

[GUNNING *moves away to* C. *with a satisfied smile.*

EVANS.

Yes, Miss. [*Exit* L.

MISS WOODWARD.

Good-bye, Mr. Gunning. If you were entirely different from what you are, I think I could have liked you; or if I were entirely different from what I am, I think I might have married you. But you are hopelessly modern and cold-blooded, and I am only an old-fashioned, healthy English girl, and a healthy English girl doesn't want to make experiments, she wants to be loved.

[*Suddenly* GUNNING *throws his arm round her, and bends forward to kiss her. She quickly raises her clenched hand as if to strike him in the face. He looks her in the eyes without flinching.*

GUNNING.

Perhaps she wants a master.

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Softly.*] Perhaps.

[*Her hand slowly drops; he kisses her.*

COLONEL.

[*Outside* L.] No, my dear; I can't wait any longer.

GUNNING.

[*In a low voice to* MISS WOODWARD.] The garden. Will you come and find me a rose?

MISS WOODWARD.

Yes.

Enter COLONEL ARMITAGE, L., MRS. PARBURY, *and* MR. PARBURY.

[MISS WOODWARD *and* GUNNING *exeunt quickly to garden*, R.

[MRS. PARBURY *comes down* L. *and sits on sofa.* PARBURY *goes* R. *and sits*, ARMITAGE *remains* C. *They are all silent and uneasy. A considerable pause, during which they are occupied with avoiding each other's eyes.*

COLONEL.

A cheerful day.

MR. PARBURY.

Yes.

MRS. PARBURY.

Very. [*Another uneasy pause.*

COLONEL.

Well, I must be going.

MR. PARBURY.

Don't go.

MRS. PARBURY.

Please stay, father. [*Another pause.*

COLONEL.

[*With much irritation.*] Well, you see I'm staying.

MRS. PARBURY.

Thank you.

MR. PARBURY.

Thank you, Colonel.

COLONEL.

But I should like to know what the devil for?

MRS. PARBURY.

Father!

MR. PARBURY.

Colonel!

COLONEL.

I really think I have cause to be angry. A more depressing function than your luncheon party to-day I've never experienced. I think I have a right to a little cheerfulness in my middle age. I'm sure I've earned it. I've had a great deal to put up with in my life.

MR. PARBURY.

No doubt, no doubt.

COLONEL.

Of course I have always accepted my full share of the blame. That I have felt to be only right and

manly. [*Pause. He looks at* CLEMENT.] As for my late dear wife, her heart was rarely deaf to a proper expression of regret. The memory of her I feel to be a blessing to this day. [*He blows his nose sympathetically.*] One thing I can tell you, Mabel, that when your dear mother and I made it up—well, we *did* make it up. I am not without some very agreeable recollections—most agreeable. [*Pause. He comes to* MRS. PARBURY.] I trust you won't require me to-night, my dear. I have to attend a Masonic Banquet.

MRS. PARBURY.

No, father; I shan't want you.

COLONEL.

Then good-bye. [*Aside to her.*] Be true to your own good heart. Your dear mother was—sometimes. [*He kisses her, and then goes to* PARBURY.] Good-bye, Clement. [*Aside to him.*] Bear up; I've been there myself. [*He goes—aside at door.*] Rather tactful, I think—rather tactful. [*Exit* L.

[*There is a constrained silence.* MRS. PARBURY *is particularly uneasy. After a moment* PARBURY *rises, lights a cigarette, and stands at mantelpiece.*

MRS. PARBURY.

Am I in the way, dear? Do you want to work?

PARBURY.

No. [*Rises, goes up* R.] To-day must be a holiday.

MRS. PARBURY.

Holidays are meant to be happy days,

PARBURY.

I suppose so.

MRS. PARBURY.

Our happy days have gone. I suppose they will never come back. [*Very sadly.*

PARBURY.

It would be wiser to look for new ones than to weep over the old ones.

MRS. PARBURY.

I'll not cry, dear; I promise you that. [*Pause. Suddenly rises and turns to him.*] Clement, can't we start again?

PARBURY.

Perhaps. But we must consider first where we now are and the direction in which we should go.

MRS. PARBURY.

Perhaps in your heart you are blaming me more than I deserve—I mean about Miss Woodward.

PARBURY.

You chose to keep the motives of your conduct a secret from me.

MRS. PARBURY.

I may have been wrong. I saw her kiss your photograph.

PARBURY.

[*Starts slightly.*] Why didn't you tell me? [*Pause.*] Why didn't you tell me?

MRS. PARBURY.

I thought—I thought it would be wiser not to.

PARBURY.

What have I ever done to earn so low an estimate of my character from you—that I am not to be trusted with the knowledge that a foolish girl had kissed my photograph.

MRS. PARBURY.

Nothing, dear; nothing. But I was jealous—furious. I am sorry. [*She is half-turned from him. He smiles very kindly, and half makes a step forward as if to take her in his arms, then restrains himself.*] [*Drooping.*] You are very, very angry with me?

PARBURY.

I am very, very pained.

MRS. PARBURY.

Can't you forgive?

PARBURY.

Yes, that is forgiven.

MRS. PARBURY.

You say you forgive, but you don't make me feel it. [*Slight pause. He is obviously tempted to come to her, but does not.*] Won't you forget too, and let us go back together?

PARBURY.

No, we can never go back.

MRS. PARBURY.

Love counts for something, Clement.

PARBURY.

[*Comes to her.*] Does love without respect count for very much? Would you like to go back to the old way—the way of petty tyranny—the way of the cowardly, unnecessary tear—the way of gaining your own ends at all costs—the way of being a spoilt child, instead of a thoughtful and considerate woman—the way of my own contemptible weakness?

MRS. PARBURY.

I never looked upon it in that light. I thought I was happy then.

PARBURY.

Because you never dreamed that my love was beginning to wear badly.

MRS. PARBURY.

[*Startled.*] Clement! . . . Oh? [*Goes to him.*] Good God!

PARBURY.

I don't want ever to think or speak of it again; but to-day I must, for if we are honest with each other, we may be able in time to save ourselves from that most pitiable and hideous of all states of existence—what is called "a cat and dog life." Have you never seen it—that domestic flower with the rotten heart? The thin outside petals of courtesy, of hollow words of endearment before others, mask the ugly truth from the casual and unobservant; but the intimate friends know, and the prying eyes of the spiteful are undeceived. That man and woman who appear in public wearing the veneered ghost of a

smile, are walking in hell. Think of their private lives—the slow death of love; the hearts poisoned with bitterness; the ever-growing rancour; the bandied insolences; the swift thoughts, black as murder; the final dull monotony of aching hatred. Do you think such cases rare? Every rank of society has its examples. Do you think such a couple have deliberately sought their hell? Oh no; they may have started as fairly as we did. Their love has not been slain by a blow, it has been pecked to a cupboard skeleton by littlenesses—little jealousies, little selfishnesses, little insults, little tyrannies, little intolerances.

MRS. PARBURY.

Clement, you terrify me. [C.R.] Oh, I am ashamed—ashamed. You have made me shudder at the old way. Dear, if I have lost a particle of your love, I'll win it back. You will show me the new way, won't you?

PARBURY.

The new way for us is the old way for the wise. It is a pleasant way strewn with flowers, the flowers of self-abnegation — of sweet reasonableness — of patient tolerance—of enduring trustfulness. Walking in that way we seek diligently for the happiness, not of ourselves, but of each other. Rising in the morning we say, not, I will find happiness to-day, but I will give happiness to-day. In that way lie peace, the fulfilment of our better selves, the full golden harvest of love.

[*As he speaks these words with deep sympathy, standing a little away from her, she gradually draws nearer to him.*

MRS. PARBURY.

I will walk in that way with you, Clement. [*She stoops, and taking one of his hands kisses it. Pause.*]

[*He stoops and raises her, and takes her in his arms.*

Enter MISS WOODWARD *and* GUNNING. GUNNING *wears a rose in his coat.*

GUNNING.

Really—I beg your pardon.

MRS. PARBURY.

Don't trouble about us any more. We're reconciled. [*She remains in her husband's arms.*]

[GUNNING *turns smilingly to* MISS WOODWARD *and takes her hand.*

MISS WOODWARD.

[*Smiling back upon* GUNNING.] Don't trouble about us any more. We're engaged.

Curtain.

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